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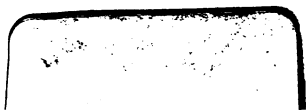
THE JEWISH MAIDEN.



WILLIAM WARD AND LOCK, 159, FLEET STREET.



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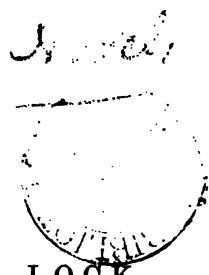




LEAH

The Jewish Maiden

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED



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LEAH

OR

THE JEWISH MAIDEN

Prologue.

CHAPTER I.

LEAH.

THERE lived in Frankfort-on-the-Maine an old Jew named Abraham Geld. Kith or kin had he none but one daughter, a gloriously handsome Jewish child of fourteen, named Leah. This daughter was the apple of the old man's eye—dearer to him than his own life. For her he toiled, and starved, and stinted. Of her were his thoughts by day and his dreams by night. Abraham Geld both professed and practised the tenets of his faith, and worshipped the God of the patriarchs—the God of Sinai—after the fashion of his ancestors. Though close and parsimonious, he was esteemed upright and honourable, and no member of the synagogue held a higher reputation for sanctity than Abraham Geld.

The old man was reputed rich, and his constant thought was to add to his wealth—not for his own but for the sake of his daughter Leah. An old Jewess, named Ruth, alone shared with him the care of the maiden, for the old man's wife had long been dead.

and but for Leah he was alone in the world. He was, as we have said, believed to be immensely rich, and it was certain that he lent money to needy nobles and princes on mortgage of their estates. It must not be supposed that though the interest he obtained was large that the transactions were all profit. Many of the nobles were as unscrupulous as they were poor, and more than once had his demands for the capital and interest of the money he had lent been met with a scornful threat to hang him from the castle walls of the Debtor if he dared press his demand. He had made very heavy and large losses; and in those days, when the poor sons of Judah were persecuted and proscribed—regarded as worse than dogs or heathen—there was but little redress obtainable.

Among the many debtors of the Jew money-lender was Prince Gunther of Monte Corro, to whom he had lent large sums of money on the security of the castle and the rich domain which lay around it. On one of the visits of the old prince to borrow more money, he mentioned to Abraham that he had need of a young girl as companion to his wife, the Lady Margaret, to whom he had lately been married. Gunther promised that could he find a young girl of the required age he would see that she had every luxury and was educated under the supervision of himself and wife, also that she should be treated as of equal rank with themselves, and in every way should enjoy the advantages of a lofty station.

It was a curious fancy on the part of old Prince Gunther, but the Jew heard it with strange feelings *of hope.*

"And what age would your highness wish the young girl to be?"

"From twelve to sixteen—or seventeen. I am not particular to a year. I am an old man; and my wife may not bless me with an heir; I should therefore wish to adopt a daughter whom I might train, and to whom I might leave my wealth."

"Would religion be important?" asked Abraham, tremblingly.

"Ah, bah!—no. I am of no religion myself," said the old prince, contemptuously, "and want no priest or prelate hanging about my castle. My god is Nature, and I am even now engaged in the prosecution of the research for the Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone, one of which shall bestow perpetual youth and life, the other boundless wealth."

The prince was a fanatical alchemist, and in the pursuit of his favourite study neglected alike both things temporal and heavenly. It was for the prosecution of his recondite studies that he had borrowed such vast sums of money and so heavily mortgaged his estates. Still he was yet a rich and powerful prince, and Abraham listened without surprise to his words. Then he said, falteringly, hesitatingly—

"Good prince—if a humble old man might dare to say so to your highness—my daughter Leah is well favoured, and worthy of your notice."

"Your daughter! Let me see her."

The old Jew rose, and, opening a door, called—

"Leah!"

And in obedience to the summons there appeared a young girl, just emerging from childhood into woman-

hood. She appeared about sixteen, but was nearly three years younger, for, like most Jewish damsels, she was precocious in development, and looked in the first blush of maidenhood. Tall, with a splendid form, head of exquisite beauty, and faultless features, the prince was at once struck by her as she stood meekly with folded hands before him. A profusion of dark brown hair floated in rich magnificence over her shoulders, which were partly bare. No corset nor lacing restrained and cramped her supple, graceful figure, which gave promise already of that luxuriance of outline to be developed by time into the form of a splendid woman.

"Look up, my child," said Abraham, noticing that she stood with cast-down eyes.

She did so ; and then for the first time the flashing glories of her dark eyes were apparent. There was a haughty, proud fire in her glance when she did look up that told of a fiery, impulsive, and passionate spirit ; but mingled with this proud look was a melting softness, which spoke also a tender, loving, and deep nature.

"On my word, a likely girl ! What say you, young lady — are you willing to come and reside with me and my wife, the Lady Margaret ?"

She turned her splendid dark eyes on her father, and replied in sweet tones, touching in their meekness —

"I am ready to do as my father wishes, whatever that may be."

"My daughter, my Leah," said the old man, drawing her towards him, "thou art a good child. I am

about to part with thee. The good and great Prince Gunther requires a companion for his wife, the Lady Margaret. He has deigned to cast favourable eyes on thee; it is for thy own interests, my child—for thy own welfare."

"Father, I am ready," was the reply.

The following day the prince returned to his château, taking with him Abraham Geld and his daughter Leah.

And thus Leah, the Jewish maiden, became an inmate of the castle of Monte Corro.

CHAPTER II.

THE TEMPTER.

MORE than two years elapsed, and Leah is still an inmate of Monte Corro. The Prince still toils in his alchemical studies, and has again and again had recourse to Abraham Geld for large sums of money ; but still the old Jew does not fear, satisfied with the bond which he holds. Most of the large sums he has advanced have been required and appropriated by one Van Pratt, a pretended alchemist, who constantly feeds the old prince's hopes with promise of the discovery of the great secret, and drains his exchequer by frequent demands for gold. At the date of which we write Abraham Geld had advanced at various times more than a million of francs. He had not done this entirely on his own judgment, but was partly persuaded thereto by the deep schemes of three men, whom we will shortly introduce to the reader. One of these was more crafty than Satan himself, while all were reckless desperadoes, whose sole aim was enriching themselves by any means. They were in league with Solomon Nesmer, the steward of Monte Corro, and also with Van Pratt, the alchemist. The chief among these was Nathan Mira, called Nathan the Jew. He was a strict attendant at the synagogue, *and outwardly* a most religious son of Judah ; but his

heart was of the blackest, and he was capable of any treachery. He had studied medicine deeply, and was skilled in drugs and medicaments. This man had obtained great influence with Abraham Geld, and the latter, led away by the specious representations of Mira, had parted with the vast sums he had on what, although he knew it not, was doubtful security. For supposing an heir to be born to the old prince, by the law of the land the Jew's bonds would be all lost—waste paper.

* * * * *

Abraham Geld sat alone in his strong-room, poring over the deeds and bonds which insured to him the money he had advanced. Presently Ruth entered and said—

“Nathan Mira would a word with thee, Abraham. He says his business is important in the extreme.”

“Let the good man enter,” said Abraham, rolling up the papers spread on the table, and restoring them to the strong-box.

Nathan entered, and casting a quick stealthy glance around the room, took the seat the other indicated.

“How fares it, worthy Nathan?” asked Abraham, “and what are thy tidings?”

“Evil tidings, I fear me, good father. I have just come from Monte Corro, where I had business with Van Pratt.”

“Monte Corro!” cried the old man, rising and trembling violently. “Is it my daughter, Leah—does aught ail her? Speak.”

“It is not respecting thy daughter Leah—for aught I know she is well.”

"For aught you know!" said the old man, excitedly—"that is not enough. Does she look well? When did you see her?"

"Strange to say, good Abraham," replied the other, "though I have frequently been in your house, and also at Monte Corro since your daughter has been there, I have never seen the maiden; nor has she ever seen me, to the best of my belief. But it is not concerning Leah I come. She is never away from the apartments of the Lady Margaret. It is not concerning her I have come to see you. Know you that your claim on the estates is forfeited if the old prince's wife should bear him a son?"

"But the prince is seventy years of age. He has been married before, and no children have been born to him!" exclaimed Abraham, in dismay.

"Nevertheless, Abraham Geld, the prince is likely to become a father. His lady is *enceinte*, and should that child prove a son and live, terrible would the disaster prove to—to you—to us."

The old money-lender was pale and trembling with excitement and terror.

"Leah, Leah, my daughter!—oh! my daughter—my beautiful, my darling Leah. It is for thee I have toiled, that thou might be great and rich, and rank with the highest, and now I hear that thy fortune, thy patrimony, is in danger. Good Nathan, what can I do?"

"There are two chances, good Abraham. The child may be a girl, or may not live; in either case, all will be well. Should it be a boy, however, all is lost—unless—unless—"

"Unless what, good Nathan?" asked Abraham, imploringly.

"Unless it can be removed," muttered Nathan, in a low tone.

"Removed!—how?" asked Abraham, in horrified tones.

"Spirited away."

"Foul play—Heaven forbid!" cried the old man, shudderingly. "These hands are unstained by crime; I love my daughter, and for her sake wish to amass wealth. But, Jehovah, thy will be done!"

Then he leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

"Old dotard!" muttered Nathan, inwardly. "He hesitates, as I thought."

"Good Abraham, you are mistaken; I mean no evil. But the great Jehovah surely wills that his own people shall have their just rights. To whom do the broad domains of Monte Corro belong after the death of old Prince Gunther?"

"To me, to me,—and after me to Leah!" exclaimed the old man, frantically, "until the redemption money is paid."

"And will it ever be paid? Think you that if the prince's wife bears a son, that son will, when he grows up, pay willingly near a million and a half of francs?"

"Alas! no. I fear not," said Abraham, moodily.

"Which, then, will be the greater wrong—that this boy, supposing one to be born, shall enjoy that which is rightly your own; or that you, a faithful servant of the Lord, should lose the fruits of the labour of your life and your daughter's patrimony; or that this child

should be removed at his birth and brought up in ignorance of his name and rank."

"But, good Nathan, 'tis impossible."

"Not so, Abraham Geld! The old prince is daily more wedded to his unholy studies, and sometimes does not leave his laboratory for days. Van Pratt has continually increasing power over his mind, and he and I can do almost as we please. I am a doctor: I will attend the lady; and, except your daughter, all others shall be excluded."

"Leah, Leah!—no, no! Her pure soul would revolt at the wrong. I will not be tempted; my Leah shall never imbrue her hands in crime. Jehovah! aid me to conquer the tempter. Perish the money—should *He* so will it—I have yet my daughter and my rectitude. I have no more to say, good Abraham, and will bid you good day."

He rose and went to the door, but turned on the threshold and said—

"Remember, Abraham Geld, that should a son be born to the house of Monte Corro, your daughter will be all but a beggar!"

Then he left the old man to his thoughts.

In vain did Abraham Geld bid the tempter avaunt; the thought of his daughter—his beloved Leah—a penniless outcast, drove him well nigh frantic; and by degrees the proposition of Nathan grew less and less repulsive to him. He thought of his gold—the produce and saving of a life of toil—and wavered; and then, when to his fancy the image of his daughter, so queenly and beautiful, arose as a poor outcast, a despised Jewess, without wealth to adorn her beauty

and purchase her that homage rightly her due, he did more than waver. The tempter prevailed, and old Abraham Geld tried to persuade himself that if an heir was born to the Prince of Monte Corro the crime of stealing him would be at worst a venial one.

* * * * *

When Mira left Abraham Geld he made his way to a café on the Parade of the town. There he joined a man whom he addressed as the Chevalier Renard. He was a young man, foppishly dressed, wearing a profusion of jewellery, and not by any means ill-looking.

"What says the old fox?" asked this latter.

"At first he fired up, called on Jehovah, and, I thought, would not entertain the idea. But I threw in a parting word, and I saw by his countenance that he was sorely tried. He will conform to what we wish, I feel sure. Our course is clear. Should a son be born to the Prince of Monte Corro, it will be our task to obtain possession of him; should it prove a daughter, well and good. In any case we will obtain from Abraham Geld the deeds and bonds. By fair means or foul we must have them, and also his assistance. We cannot establish our claim unless we can beguile him to our own ends, through his love to his daughter."

"Have you seen her?"

"Never. What is she like?"

"Beautiful as summer day—gloriously handsome," said the Chevalier, enthusiastically. "To-morrow I leave for Monte Corro. I will keep my eye upon the

girl; she might prove dangerous. First, however, I will call upon Abraham Geld, and hear his decision. Although he knows it not, he is almost in our power. We need his aid, and must have it, only to fling him on one side when we have gained our end. If the wife of the prince give birth to a son, we will secure him and keep him in our hands. In any case we will have the bonds from Abraham. Prince Gunther and wife will both die ere many months are over, and then the estates, worth at least five millions of francs, will be ours."

"Both die in the course of a few months, good Mira—how know you that?"

"I fear so," he said, significantly. "I fear much that the seeds of mortal disease linger in both. Nathan Mira, called in scorn Nathan the Jew, will be the physician of Monte Corro for the future. To-morrow I go to undertake my new duties. I will notify to you and our other comrades when your presence will be required at the castle. A messenger will arrive, and bear this message only—'*The hour is come!*' When you receive it, make all haste to join Janos and Abraham Geld. The final scene of the drama, which shall make us rich men, will be at hand. Trust me to play it out. I will take care to inform Abraham of all that is necessary."

Nathan the Jew went out, and again visited Abraham Geld. Then he returned to his inn, and, mounting his horse, rode off to Monte Corro.

END OF PROLOGUE.

P A R T I.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHEVALIER RENARD—THE HOUR IS COME!

THE hour is ten in the forenoon, and the Grand Parade is just beginning to fill with inhabitants or visitors whom business or pleasure attracts. The Imperial Hotel had opened its doors, and in its splendid saloons were rapidly assembling a goodly company of all nations, and in all the various costumes which nationality or individual taste dictated. Conspicuous in the motley crowd—among which are men speaking every language, and wearing every costume known—are two men, separated by the whole length of the room. One of these men had a seat in the Heidelberg diligence. His costume is strange and *outré* even for Frankfort, where every one seems to be endeavouring to outherod Herod in extravagance of dress. He wore a broad-brimmed hat with a black plume, very much like those worn by the Cavaliers who rallied round King Charles the First, and fought so bravely, so unsuccessfully, against Cromwell's iron-clad troops. His eyes and forehead were concealed by the overhanging brim, but such

of his features as were visible were remarkable for their almost womanish beauty of expression and outline. Dark curls, long and soft for a man, fell over his shoulders in abundance, increasing the feminine expression given by his handsome features. He wore a cloak of dark crimson cloth, draped round his tall, graceful figure, in a most melodramatic style. The other traveller was waiting his turn at the office window of the hotel, where places were booked, and inquiries answered, as to the diligence and post-horses. He stood with folded arms leaning against the wall, grave, in deep thought. He appeared about forty years of age, and a few grey hairs might be seen among his dark brown hair. An expression which, though calm, was not the serenity of a mind at ease, but rather the effect of powerful self-control, was on his features. The hand which was outside his heavy cloak held a small medallion suspended by a gold chain from his neck. His eyes were fixed on this, which he carefully concealed in his hand from the gaze of the curious. It was the portrait of a young female of great beauty. Around the portrait was a lock of bright fair hair; and his eyes filled with tears as he gazed. Suddenly starting up from his reverie, he concealed the portrait, and said to the clerk in attendance at the office—

“I wish to go to the castle of Monte Corro.”

“There is no public conveyance, and the high road does not go beyond Obenburg.”

“How many leagues?”

“Eight German miles, of which two are across the fields. Will you have a guide?”

The stranger inquired the price. It appeared too much, for he replied—

“No; I shall go alone.”

He then paid his bill, and turned towards the door.

At the same moment, the young man with the scarlet cloak also passed out, without, however, perceiving him. They crossed the yard together each so intent on his own thoughts as not to see the other. As they passed out on to the Parade, a courier dashed up at a gallop, and reining in his horse, white with foam, dismounted.

The two strangers passed close to him.

The courier saw them, and started violently. An expression of the utmost astonishment was on his face as he regarded first one and then the other. It was evident that he knew both. The younger of the two turned to the right, and walked slowly down the Parade; whilst the other took an opposite direction.

“May I never drink another glass of beer,” said the courier, “if that handsome young fellow is not one of the bastards of Monte Corro. And the other, his hair was darker five years ago, when he married the Lady Helen, but I swear it is the Viscount Camille.”

He followed them on to the Parade, and then halted. The one he had called bastard had gone to the right, the other to the left. After considering for a moment, the courier followed the viscount; but the latter turned sharply down a narrow street, and he lost him. He returned to seek the other, but he also had disappeared.

“I ought to have accosted them at once,” he mut-

CHAPTER II.

JANOS THE MAGYAR—THE HOUR IS COME.

FRITZ having had a flask of Rhine wine, which he poured down his throat, without delay left the house of the Chevalier Renard.

"Jolly generous fellows these Frenchmen," he said—"better than all your lager beer-swilling Germans. I rather think though that Monsieur Renard was not quite so well at ease as he pretended to be when I gave him the message. 'The hour is come!'—What the devil does it mean? What hour, and why has it come? But I shall know more, perhaps, when I have delivered the other messages."

He walked rapidly on through the outskirts of Frankfort. It was plain that he knew his way thoroughly, for he threaded the numerous bye-streets and lanes without hesitation. The houses were mostly of a superior class, and gave the idea of wealth and luxury.

He passed on till he came to the public gardens on the banks of the river. He walked rapidly on till he came to a house standing back from the road. Here he knocked, and the door being opened to him he asked—

"I wish to speak to Captain Janos."

The servant desired him to follow, and passing up some stairs he entered a saloon hung round with swords, pistols, and the accoutrements of a cavalry officer. Two men with masks on their faces, and pads or plastrons on their arms and legs, were fencing with sabres. Both appeared to be cavalry officers, and were fine handsome men.

"Say what you have to say," said Captain Janos, not deigning to turn his head, nor desisting from cutting, thrusting, guarding, and fencing. The sparks of fire flew from the sabres as they whistled in the air, clashing together as the fierce blow was skilfully parried.

Fritz thought to himself, "If this is only fencing, I wonder what fighting is like."

Fiercer waxed the combat, till they almost forgot they were friends, not enemies, and cursed the thick plastrons, which resisted with a dull thud cuts which would have taken off a horse's leg. At last Janos administered a terrific cut on the iron mask which covered his opponent's head. The blow could not seriously injure the head thus covered; but it was sufficient for a moment to stagger him. The next instant the sword flew from his grasp.

Janos had disarmed him, and was clearly the victor. With a crestfallen air he picked up his weapon.

"Janos," he said, "you are the very devil. I am the best swordsman in the king's cuirassiers, but, by Jove, you beat me."

"Come, let us have another bout," said Janos.

"But there is a man waiting to speak to you," was the reply, as Janos put himself in attitude.

Janos turned and removed the iron mask which covered his face. He was attired in the undress uniform of a Hungarian dragoon. He was a tall, swarthy, powerful man of about thirty; but his handsome features wore a reckless, determined, almost brutal, expression. His beauty was that of the tiger.

He regarded the courier with the utmost indifference, and said—

“What is your business with me, Mr. Courier?”

“I come from the castle of Monte Corro.”

The dragoon regarded him with a fixed, hard look, and said, simply—

“Speak!”

“*The hour is come!*”

CHAPTER III.

ABRAHAM GELD—THE HOUR IS COME.

CAPTAIN JANOS rose without reply, and, taking his sword, put himself in attitude again. "Without there," he shouted to the servant, "give that man some wine."

As Fritz descended he heard again the clash of the swords and the stamping of feet, as the two officers met in mock combat.

"*Ma foi!*" he muttered; "this brave gentleman seems to pay no more heed to the message than the chevalier, who appeared to think his hair-curling, scenting, and pommading, of more consequence. I wonder if the next will treat it as lightly."

He drank his wine, and proceeded on his way to deliver the third message. As he went on the streets got narrower and dirtier, and the houses poorer, till he came at last to the Jewish quarter of the city. He threaded winding lanes and filthy courts, where the stenches and dirt of the gutter were only equalled by the squalor and darkness of the interiors. On all sides, however, he perceived signs of that activity and business which distinguish the Jew quarters of every town in Europe.

They work silently, timidly, like mice, as if afraid

to be thought busy, lest people should also think them rich, and in those days to be thought rich was, for a Jew, very dangerous, for persecution was still rife. Jews were still looked on as dogs, and compelled to live in particular quarters of the towns.

Fritz pushed steadily on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The ceaseless, silent bustle almost confused him; the busy crowd hurried hither and thither, each intent on his own business. Hardly a word was spoken, all were too much engaged on the worship of the mighty god mammon.

Occasionally handsome carriages would drive up and stop at the doors of shops whose whole contents seemed scarce worth a florin. Nevertheless, from their gloomy, dirty depths might be heard the clink of the bright gold, as the despised Jew handed it over to the needy or spendthrift count or baron—handed over indeed, but usually only for the time, for soon the glittering coin would return fourfold, or the crafty Israelite would have his grasp on many a broad acre or stately château, which had perhaps descended from father to son for hundreds of years.

It was now past noon, and the clocks of the numerous churches rang out the hour. Fritz turned down a lane even more dirty and gloomy than the narrow streets through which he had already passed. The sky was overcast, and a storm seemed to be brewing.

"I must make haste," he said to himself, "or I shall be late, and get a drenching into the bargain. Surely this must be the street—surely this must be the street."

He paused as if at fault, and presently asked of a

passer-by, "Can you direct me to the street of the Judengasse?"

"This is it," was the reply.

"Ah," he said, joyfully, "I cannot then be far from the house of Abraham Geld, the money-lender. Can you direct me to it?"

"Yonder it is," said the man, pointing to a poor-looking shop about thirty paces from him. There was no sign of any kind to denote the trade carried on there; but a few old clothes were hung at the door, and a few cheap daubs of oil-paintings were displayed inside. An old Jew woman, poorly dressed, was in the shop. The courier entered, and addressing himself to her, asked for Abraham Geld.

The old woman rose in silence, and proceeded down a dark passage, without saying a word in reply.

He heard the opening of a heavy door, the old woman disappeared, and the door clanged loudly after her. Shortly it again opened, and she beckoned him to advance. He did so, and found himself in another long dark passage, feebly illuminated by a single lamp. He followed the old Jewess to the end, when she opened another door, and a flood of light nearly blinded him.

He found himself in a large and gorgeously furnished room. Rich soft carpets were on the floor; the walls were hung with the most costly drapery, splendid pictures adorned them, and the furniture was of Oriental style and magnificence. No daylight penetrated this saloon; but it was lit by a splendid chandelier containing many burners, suspended from the ceiling. Fritz, a retainer of the sovereign and princely

can wait, I am in no hurry." And so saying he passed into the ante-chamber.

Fritz could not see his face.

"Come nearer," said the old man to Fritz, in low tones, and speak.

"A message from Monte Corro."

"Go on."

The eyes of the Jew shone with a strange light, and he regarded him with an anxious look. He trembled all over.

Then Fritz lowered his voice still more and said—

"The hour is come!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD MAN'S LOVE FOR LEAH TEMPTS HIM
TO CRIME.

THE JEW was far from receiving the message with the same indifference and stoicism as the Dragoon Janes and the Chevalier Renard. He turned of an ashy paleness, the perspiration broke out on his forehead, his hand trembled as he took off his spectacles, and repeated with a faltering voice—"The hour is come! The hour is come!"

Then he shaded his eyes, and muttered to himself—"I am a poor man, and have a daughter who is dearer to me than my own life blood. O Lord, who gave her to me, have mercy. Thou wilt not punish me for wishing to make her great and mighty, to rank with the princes of the earth." Abraham started on perceiving Fritz, and said—"You may go."

"I am thirsty," replied the courier.

"Ruth, give this man water."

Fritz retired, grumbling, for he had hoped for more wine. The other man entered from the antechamber as the other passed out.

"Twenty crowns," he said. "I must have twenty crowns."

Abraham opened a desk and counted out the money.

The stranger gave his ring in return, looking fixedly at him.

"It is possible we may meet again at the Castle of Monte Corro, worthy Abraham Geld—till then adieu."

He passed out.

"O Lord! O Lord! that man has heard and guessed. Alas! what I do is for my poor child, my darling Leah, whom Heaven in its mercy guide and protect." He rose and entered the other room, where the old woman Ruth awaited him.

"Ruth," he said, "I am going; I am awaiting two companions; I am going to see Leah, and—and—" he stammered, "to arrange some other business."

"You go to Monte Corro," said the old woman. "I like not these visits, Abraham Geld, nor your company. Beware lest that Nathan lead you into evil, and bring your grey hairs with sorrow and dishonour to the grave."

"Enough. Do not fear; it is all for the advantage of Leah. I go to see to the patrimony of the Christian prince with whom she is. Fasten well the doors, Ruth; let no one enter in my absence. Great God! if they were to see all this, they would think me rich and rob me."

Soon was heard the tramp of horses' hoofs, and two cavaliers rode up, attended by a servant also on horseback. This third horse was for Abraham Geld.

"Mount, good Abraham, and away," said the Hungarian, for it was he and Renard; "do you not know that 'the hour has come'?"

Abraham did so, and they started off at a good pace in the direction of the barrier. As they approached

the ramparts, they saw a cavalier, dressed in the French manner, and wearing a large cloak. He came from a cross street which led into theirs, riding at a hard gallop, apparently buried in thought. His horse passed so close to that of Janos as almost to brush him. Still he took no notice.

Abraham, however, gave vent to an expression of surprise, and Renard reined in his horse suddenly, and turned deadly pale.

The Jew recognised in the strange man he who had left his ring and borrowed twenty crowns.

But whom did Renard recognise?

"Did he see me?" he muttered, hoarsely; "did he see me?"

Janos looked at him with astonishment, and replied—

"He did not see you."

Renard breathed more freely and raised his eyes.

The cavalier was riding on in the same direction as themselves. It was the stranger whom Fritz had seen at the hotel, and called the Viscount Camille.

Renard was completely changed by this meeting. His mouth, before all smiles and laughter, now wore a vindictive, cruel expression; his complexion was livid. He wrapped his cloak tightly about him, and caused it to conceal as much of his face as possible.

"That is twice," he said to himself; "if we meet a third time, he shall die. I will not throw away another chance."

"Do you know that man?" asked Janos.

"Forward, gentlemen!" was the reply. "If he takes the high road he must never reach his destination. That man has in his hands our fortunes, perhaps

our lives. He is going to the castle of Monte Corro. I know it—I am sure. He must never reach it alive.”

The handsome face of the Magyar remained calm and impassive. Abraham Geld turned pale, and ejaculated in trembling accents, “O Lord! O Lord! it is too true—he is going to Monte Corro—he told me so.”

They passed the barriers, and struck along the high road. At this moment the express diligence for Obem-berg passed them at a gallop. On the imperial was seated the young man with the scarlet cloak, whom the courier had recognised in the courtyard of the hotel.

But the bastard of Monte Corro, as Fritz had called him, seemed to have multiplied, for by his side were seated two other young men, similarly attired in scarlet cloaks, and wearing, like him, large slouching hats, with an ostrich plume. The diligence dashed on till the crimson cloaks became faint, and disappeared in the distance.

Our three travellers diverged from the main road, and struck across a bridle path.

“We must be before him,” muttered Renard; “he must never reach Monte Corro alive.”

CHAPTER V.

THE FAMILY OF MONTE CORRO.

THE Count Raymond Camille rode on swiftly, lost in thought. He had come to Germany to pursue a villain who had robbed him of his whole fortune ; he was also there in the hopes of solving the mystery which surrounded the murder of Ulric of Monte Corro, the father of his wife.

Count Ulric had been brutally murdered, but though he had many friends, hitherto no one had molested the murderers, or brought them to account. It was said that they were under the protection of a power too terrible to be attacked. The three illegitimate sons of the murdered count had sworn to avenge the death of their brave, loyal-hearted father ; but as they themselves were seriously compromised by their connexion with revolutionary and secret societies, and by their political turbulence, they had hitherto been unsuccessful.

They were singularly alike : tall, well formed, and handsome. Their courage and skill caused them to be looked up to as the head of every desperate undertaking they engaged in. They were twenty years of age, and all born at a birth. As they were illegitimate, they chose to be known only as Rudolph, Ernest, and Albert ; but the country people persisted in giving

them their father's title. They were the heroes of many adventures, and never scrupled to join any enterprise, however desperate. None spoke against them. They had never been known to do an unkind or unjust act, and yet they were more feared and admired than loved. Their cold, impassive demeanour and *hauteur*, so strange in young men, was considered to have its rise in something supernatural. They were supposed to derive much of their power from spirits of the invisible world; and some even went so far as to assert that they were under the direct patronage of Satan, the Prince of Darkness. Be this as it may, they had the reputation of possessing supernatural powers, and few cared to offend them.

During the life of their father, Count Ulric, Rudolph, Albert, and Ernest, lived with him at the Castle Roche, an ancestral estate of the Monte Corro family. Their mother had died tragically shortly after their birth. She had seen and loved the Count Ulric, but being daughter of a family at feud with the Monte Corro, their union was impossible with the consent of either. Accordingly, Count Ulric did as was often done in those lawless times, he gathered his own retainers, and all the armed force he could, and carried her off to his castle. Before, however, the priest could arrive to make them man and wife, within less than three days, her father attacked the castle with an overwhelming force, and rescued her, unwilling as she was. It was not till nearly a year after that Ulric could, despite of all his attempts, succeed in *storming* the castle where his promised bride was

confined. At last, however, he succeeded in discovering and taking the castle in which she was imprisoned by storm. But alas ! he only recovered her dead body ; her father, relentless and cruel to the last, slew his daughter with his own hands rather than that she should again fall into the power of his enemy, Count Ulric, although that enemy was the father of her three children, who were spattered with their mother's blood.

Count Ulric took back the children with him, after hanging his murdered bride's cruel father over the drawbridge, and burned the castle. A year later, Count Ulric married, and by his wife had two daughters, the Ladies Helen and Margaret. Raymond Camille married one, while the other, in accordance with an old superstitious legend of the family, was married to Prince Gunther, her father's brother, and three times her age.

The legend ran to the effect that the blood of Monte Corro fertilizes itself ; that when, from the failure of male heirs, the ancient family was on the point of extinction, it always arose like a phoenix from its ashes.

The archives of the family of Monte Corro showed that whenever the line seemed on the point of extinction, it was always resuscitated by some decrepid old man—some old prince or count of eighty marrying a youthful member of his own family frequently within the prohibited degrees ; but, for the rich dispensations were easily obtained. It never failed on such a marriage, that however hopeless the chance of the old man's being blest with an heir seemed, that his young

wife presented him with one. This was popularly supposed to be owing to the good genius of the family.

Others, however, suggested an explanation which was not consistent with the chastity of the young wife or the honour of the old husband.

Accordingly, it was settled that Margaret—a beautiful girl, soft, tender, and yielding by disposition—should wed old Prince Gunther. She did not attempt to resist the wishes of her father. She wept bitterly when she said farewell to her sister and her three brothers—Rudolph, Albert, and Ernest, and then bade them adieu, perhaps for ever.

The churlish old Prince Gunther scarcely knew of—certainly would not have acknowledged—their existence.

Perhaps among the gay cavaliers and gallant soldiers—the friends of her half-brothers—there might have been one who had whispered words of love to her. Perhaps there was one before whose ardent gaze she was wont to drop her bright blue eyes and blush. Perhaps she had already felt the first throbbings of young love. Be that as it may, she obeyed her father and became the wife of old Prince Gunther.

The ponderous gate of the castle of Monte Corro clanged behind her as she entered with her old husband; and its dull sound seemed to her the knell of all earthly hopes or happiness.

It was shortly after this unnatural marriage that the prince obtained the Jewish maid, Leah, as a companion for his young wife, who seemed to pine away in the gloomy solitude of the castle.

Her sister Helen had a happier lot. She met the

Count Raymond Camille, a friend of her father's, and loved him, and in due course was married to him.

The viscount had but a small fortune, but that did not interfere with their happiness. But alas ! misfortune came.

Before his marriage he had known in Paris a man calling himself the Chevalier Renard. He was tolerably well received in the world, was considered a pleasant companion, and by some esteemed good-looking as well as pleasant. The viscount knew nothing of his origin, or whence he came ; but, easy, good-natured man, took him at his word, without caring to inquire. Renard soon wormed himself completely into his confidence : so much so that he trusted him with everything.

Fatal confidence !

For a time Renard acquitted himself with the utmost exactitude. He was obliging and complaisant to an extreme ; and the good-natured Camille thought he could hardly thank him enough for his solicitude. Renard had, he said, some relations in Paris. Camille had a large sum of money to receive from his wife's estates in the neighbourhood, of which he had just effected an advantageous sale. He was delighted at the Chevalier's offer to transmit it all for him, and left everything in his hands.

At this time occurred the murder of Count Ulric.

Renard suggested that this was a good time to sell the property he inherited from his father-in-law. Raymond Camille assented ; everything was placed in the hands of Renard, who started on his journey, obtained the money, and never returned. Poor Raymond

Camille was almost utterly ruined. He endeavoured to find Renard, but in vain, as he was too cunning. We have seen the unfortunate count at the hotel, we have seen him sell his ring to Abraham Geld, and we have seen him riding in the direction of Monte Corro.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HELL OF MONTE CORRO—MURDER.

LET us return to the three associates, riding on in the direction of Monte Corro castle. Presently they arrived at the summit of a small hill.

"Monte Corro is there," said Renard, pointing with his finger to a large gloomy-looking castle in the distance, on the summit of an immense and precipitous rock. "The viscount is coming ;—let us decide what we shall do."

They were in a wild, gloomy-looking place. Before them, at about a hundred paces distance, was a double row of tall fir-trees ; the night was dark and tempestuous, and the wind howled and moaned dismally among their branches. The trees formed an avenue which seemed to lead towards the castle.

"The Hell is there," said Renard, pulling up his horse.

"I don't understand you," replied Janos. "A man is coming—this Viscount Camille ; he is dangerous to us, you say, and must be removed. *Eh bien !*—it is night, I am armed—it will soon be finished !" and he tapped the pistols in his holsters.

"Pistols are noisy friends. I tell you that the Hell of Monte Corro is at the bottom of that avenue."

"O Lord! O Lord!" murmured the Jew, vaguely understanding from his companions that some evil was intended.

Renard approached the Hungarian and whispered to him, frequently pointing down the avenue.

The Jew was trembling and nervous, and could hardly keep his seat. Suddenly he cried, "Look! see yonder," and pointed down the road they had already travelled. A dark object was seen approaching.

Janos and Renard gazed long and earnestly; they were soon able to distinguish that the dark object which the Jew had first seen was a man on horseback.

"It is our man," said Renard, between his clenched teeth, in a husky voice. "It is the most noble the Viscount Raymond Camille; how gaily he rides on, doubtless he thinks he will sup at Monte Corro to-night. Ha! ha! ride on, most gallant viscount, to your death."

The wind howled among the branches of the bare, gaunt fir-trees, and the clouds, driven on by the tempest, allowed the moonlight to blaze forth in its glistening glory on the three associates.

The old Jew was in an agony of horror and apprehension; he seemed beside himself with terror. Janos sat motionless as a statue, his handsome features bearing an expression which seemed one of contempt for his companions.

Again the old Jew cried out—"See, there, in the brushwood!" This time he pointed down the avenue. Janos and Renard turned in the direction he indicated, *but could see nothing.*

"Pshaw!" said the Hungarian, "there is nothing but what your cowardice conjures up.

"I tell you," replied Abraham, "I saw some one moving among the bushes to our right."

"Come on," said Janos, impatiently, "let us leave the brave Chevalier Renard to finish this affair in his own fashion. If cold steel or an ounce of lead will do it, I am the man, but as to disposing of an enemy in the manner he proposes, I'll none of it. I wish you luck in your attempt, my brave Renard," he said, somewhat sarcastically, as he turned his horse's head towards the castle.

"You can keep a place for me at the supper-table," was the reply; "I shall not be long behind you."

In a few moments the clatter of their horses' hoofs might be heard down the avenue, then all was still. Renard was alone; he waited in silence.

We will take the opportunity of describing the position of the castle of Monte Corro, and of that which Renard had called the Hell.

The hill upon which the castle of Monte Corro was placed was in form somewhat similar to a lion in repose. The castle itself was situated upon the highest point, as it were, between the ears, while the only approach was from behind. After mounting the first acclivity, which might be represented by the hind-quarters, the castle itself was in full view, and a straight road between an avenue of firs appeared to lead directly to it. But this was not the case; about half-way up the avenue was a quantity of low brush-wood and shrubs, concealing from the view a dreadful

chasm, which was known as the "Hell of Monte Corro."

This chasm, or gulf, was a kind of natural shaft to a tunnel, which a former prince of Monte Corro had caused to be excavated through the solid mountain. The road through this tunnel was at the command of the lords of Monte Corro, and was seldom used. In addition to this tunnel, which had been purposely cut in the mountains, were a series of gloomy caves in connexion with it, which had been caused by the falling in of immense masses of rock and earth. The entrance to many of these caves had become blocked up by tons of fallen earth, and had never been explored by man.

The depth of the chasm was many hundred feet, and rumour said that more than one unfortunate had there met his death.

Nevertheless, each succeeding Prince of Monte Corro refused or neglected to have it touched, or even to have the dreadful gulf surrounded by a railing or fence.

The real road deviated to the right, and was much more narrow, and less likely to be observed than the treacherous avenue, at the end of which might be seen the grim old castle. Nine out of ten who were unacquainted with the place, would have avoided the narrow tortuous path which wound round the mountain, and dashed fearlessly along the broad straight avenue, which appeared to lead in a straight line to Monte Corro.

The moon was now wholly obscured by heavy masses of clouds which the rising storm drove in tumultuous confusion before it.

The clatter of horses' hoofs was heard as the traveller cantered up the hill towards Renard. Drawing his cloak still closer round him, he concealed as much of his face as possible, and remained motionless in the centre of the road.

The traveller approached, and perceiving him reined in his horse. It was the Viscount Raymond.

"Can you direct me to the castle of Monte Corro, fair sir?" he said.

"I am going there," replied Renard, in a feigned voice, pulling his hat still further over his face, "and will show you."

"Thanks! I shall be only too glad of your assistance, as I have never been in this neighbourhood before."

"Straight down the avenue," said Renard, still in a feigned voice, pretending to arrange something amiss with his stirrup-leather—"I will follow you immediately."

The viscount rode steadily over the soft springy turf, congratulating himself on the near termination of his journey.

Shortly Renard followed and joined him. They were now close to the brushwood, which concealed the yawning mouth of the Hell. Camille was riding a little in advance, and had already entered the shadow of the shrubs. Before him was the gaping chasm, almost entirely concealed from view; the turf appeared merely a little darker in colour, that was all. Behind him was Renard, the man whom he had patronized and befriended, and who, in return, was about to murder him.

Suddenly his horse stopped, and, snorting loudly, refused to proceed. He was on the very verge of the gulf.

The howling wind moaned among the trees, and for a moment tore away the veil of clouds, and the bright moonlight streamed forth, revealing the pale, ghastly face of the intending murderer.

He trembled from fear. He was a coward; but his was a nature which, although cowardly, impelled him to carry out his design, in spite of the fear and horror it inspired, and his voice trembled, and he could hardly disguise his agitation as he said, still endeavouring to disguise his voice—

“What is the matter there? why do you stop the path?”

The viscount endeavoured to urge his horse forward in vain—the animal refused to move.

Renard rode close up. The moon was again obscured, and nothing could be heard but the hollow rushing of the wind among the trees. He was close to the viscount, who still endeavoured vainly to urge his horse forward. Renard raised his hand, and struck Camille's horse several tremendous blows across the flank with his heavy whip.

The animal reared for a moment, and then plunged wildly forward.

There was a crashing and rustling amongst the brushwood as it opened, and then closed behind horse and rider. There was a loud, despairing cry, a rushing sound as of a falling body, and then, after an interval, a dull crush from the bottom of the Hell, and all was *still*.

The howling wind moaned among the trees, the clouds were torn asunder, and the bright moonlight streamed forth, revealing the pale, ghastly face of Renard the murderer.

He gazed wildly around him ; the scene was one that might well inspire even the innocent with dread.

The yawning mouth of the dreadful gulf, partially concealed by the brushwood—the gaunt fir-trees nodding and bending to the storm like tall ghosts who had witnessed the deed of blood—and the gloomy castle on the summit of the rock, dark and sombre—a deep-red light shining forth from the central tower, as if some hideous one-eyed demon had seen and rejoiced over the scene just enacted—all combined to form a grand and terrible picture.

Renard wiped the perspiration from his clammy brow, and drew a long breath of relief and satisfaction. He knew fear, but not remorse. Suddenly he started ; he thought he saw a moving object in the bushes on his right hand.

Long and anxiously he gazed, but could detect no motion.

He turned his horse's head, and prepared to ride down the true road to the castle.

The storm increased in fury. A sudden gust burst asunder the fastenings of his cloak, and blew back the brim of his hat, which concealed his face.

He hastily adjusted his cloak, and drew his hat again over his face ; but in that brief moment he saw two eyes fixed on him from the brushwood. Driving the spurs into his horse's flank, he galloped rapidly away from the scene of his crime. At the same mo-

ment a figure, in the scarlet livery of Monte Corro, arose from the brushwood.

It was Fritz, the courier. He advanced cautiously to the mouth of the Hell, and peered down into its gloomy depths. He could see or hear nothing. All was quiet as the grave. Fritz threw himself upon his knees, and recited the prayer for the dead.

CHAPTER VII.

PRINCE GUNTHER'S COMPACT.

RENARD galloped on till he came to the place where Janos and the Jew left him. He was pale and trembling, and could scarcely keep his seat in the saddle. Large drops of perspiration burst forth on his forehead, and trickled down his face. His agitation, however, was not caused by remorse, but by *fear* and *horror*. The sound of that wild, despairing death-cry still rang in his ears, and he could not forget those two burning eyes which he saw fixed on him from the brushwood when the moon shone forth for a moment, as if to be a witness of the dark deed.

But Renard was not a man to trouble himself long about a danger which was not imminent. It was sufficient for him that he had destroyed his enemy, and had escaped for the time. And as for the eyes that he saw in the brushwood, it might have been all fancy, or if it were not, perhaps they did not see him, and even if they did, they could not have recognised him.

Reasoning thus, he regained courage, and, taking the road to the castle, hastened to follow his companions. As he mounted the brow of the hill on which was Monte Corro, he halted, and, looking back,

surveyed with obvious satisfaction the wide expanse of country, which stretched for many miles in all directions from the castle.

"All this wild domain—all the fair fields, the rustling forests, the light streams, fertile vineyards, the grass land, and the arable land, the towns, and the villages—all belong to old Prince Gunther, of Monte Corro. They will be ours. This night I have removed another obstacle. We have now nothing to fear, if we can but dispose of the three bastards as easily as I have that poor fool Camille. If!—we must—it must be done. If they interfere, they *must* die—shall die. And yet I do not fancy their cursed interference—people tell strange tales of them—they have never been defeated or outwitted. Can it be true that they have assistance from the spirits of the other world? Pshaw! nonsense!" he added, endeavouring to reassure himself; "they are only men, and will do well not to cross our path."

Although he endeavoured to laugh at his fears, it was evident that Renard was ill at ease. He did not relish the thought. Although he had never seen them to his knowledge, still he had heard much that was far from encouraging concerning their determination, bravery, and skill—not mere skill in the use of weapons, but skill which would meet craft with craft, and hurl back an abortive scheme on the head of its originator. All who had attempted to injure or annoy them had been signally and disgracefully defeated, and few on whom they had set their mark failed to feel the effects of their vengeance.

Renard rode on, thinking alternatively of the three

brothers and the goodly domain of Monte Corro, which he one day hoped to possess.

Once again he paused and gazed behind him on the landscape occasionally revealed by the moon.

"Yes," he muttered, "a fine estate—splendid estate; but there are six of us—too many—five too many. It must, it shall be mine—mine entirely, unconditionally. Janos, Abraham, Nathan Mira, Van Pratt, and Solomon Nesmer, shall have none of it."

Abraham Geld, the Jew, rode on with his companion Janos in silence; thoughts similar to those of Renard's passed through his mind.

"Yes," he muttered, as he also looked back on the broad estates of Monte Corro—"mine—mine it is—it shall be mine; not for myself, but for my dear child Leah. Yes, I will make her a great one in the land; mine and yours shall be these broad and fertile lands. Janos, Nesmer, Nathan Mira, Van Pratt, and yon thieving, murdering Renard, shall have none of it."

Janos, the Hungarian, kept his eye on the old Jew's face as he surveyed his intended property. It almost seemed that he could read his thoughts, for a cold, sarcastic, bitter smile was on his face. The old Jew met his eyes, and turned away in confusion from the searching glance and demon smile.

Janos, however, said nothing, but rode on in silence.

We will now leave the three conspirators, and penetrating the castle of Monte Corro, see how its inmates are employed.

The dark red, lurid light still gleams forth from the

His young wife, the Lady Margaret, for a long time gave no sign of maternity; and old Gunther almost began to doubt the truth of the old family legend, which asserted that the blood of Monte Corro never dies out entirely.

He was the last of his race, seventy years of age, and without a son.

The doctor, Nathan Mira, succeeded in persuading him that, by the use of wonderful medicines, whose virtues he alone knew, he could cause his wife, the Lady Margaret, to bear him a son.

Accordingly, they were a necessity of his existence. He could not bear that either should be away for even a day; for were they not able to bestow upon him immortality, and was not the wonderful skill of Mira to make him a father?

Affairs went on in this manner for a long time. Gunther would have more gold, and Solomon Nesmer took care he should be well supplied.

At last they thought their plan was ripe.

Gradually Nesmer began to hint at the difficulty of getting more money.

Nathan Mira became more urgent in his demands, and more lavish in his promises. Gunther really believed that at last he was on the point of discovering both the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone—the secret of turning all metals into gold. Nathan Mira also assured him that before twelve months he should be a father, if he implicitly followed his directions.

But money must be had. Nathan Mira and he wanted large sums for the prosecution of their experi-

ments ; and Van Pratt also was making continual demands. Nesmer declared that "money could not be had immediately, unless——" And he hesitated, as if unwilling to proceed.

"Say on, good Solomon," said Gunther, "be not afraid to speak. You have served me long and faithfully, and have a right to advise me."

"Is your highness quite sure of discovering the great secret which shall turn baser metals into gold?"

"Quite certain, good Nesmer. Within six months I shall be enabled to make as much gold as would buy an empire! Already, by the aid of Doctor Mira, I have obtained the metal in small quantities. See here, my worthy steward—what think you of that?" and he produced several pieces of the glittering metal.

His eyes glittered and his thin sallow cheek flushed, as he looked fondly on the yellow drops in his hand.

Solomon Nesmer examined them carefully. It was undoubtedly gold of the purest quality.

He threw up his hands and ejaculated—

"Wonderful! wonderful!—Then your highness has really discovered the secret?"

"Certainly, certainly; but it will require great pains and great care to perfect the necessary operations. Money, too, must also be had, as some of Mira's elixirs are wondrous costly."

"Then, if your highness is quite certain, I will speak."

"There is but one way of getting money in large sums immediately."

"Your highness has no son."

"Yes ; but Doctor Mira says that the Lady Margaret will bear me one !"

"I trust sincerely your wishes may be fulfilled. Far be it from me, most noble prince, to injure your heir or the Lady Margaret."

"Abraham Geld, the money-lender of Frankfort," continued Nesmer, "will give you one million florins in gold, and one hundred thousand florins a year as long as your highness lives, on condition of your assigning to him the castle and estates of Monte Corro after your death."

Gunther was staggered. Insane as he was in his search for the secret of life, he still saw that the estates and principalities were worth more than ten times the amount offered.

"But my son," replied Gunther—"if I am blessed with one—I cannot sell his patrimony."

"Your highness must be aware," said Nesmer, "that by the law of Germany any such contract would be null and void if a son were born to you."

"True, true ; I had forgotten."

"Besides, your highness, if you discover the secret of life and death, you will never die ; and the Jew, Abraham Geld, will be bound to continue the payment of the hundred thousand florins *as long as you live*. And also, if you have a son and should die, the contract is illegal, and your heir would take possession of the estates of his father."

"Excellent—excellent ! Good Nesmer, you are a treasure. I shall have a son and I shall live for ever, and this Jew will never get either estates or money, unless I choose."

Nesmer turned away, and a strange smile flitted across his cunning features.

He knew well that Gunther was too old a man ever to hope for an heir ; and *Nathan Mira, the physician, would take care he did not live too long.*

Accordingly, Gunther joyfully executed the contract and received part, not all, of the money.

Weeks and months rolled on. Van Pratt still promised the speedy fulfilment of his hopes, and Doctor Nathan Mira declared himself more certain than ever of Lady Margaret's presenting the old prince with a son.

"Before another half year has passed," said Van Pratt, "your highness shall drink of the waters of life, and find as much gold as would content Cræsus at the bottom of your crucibles."

"Before another twelvemonth has passed," said Mira, "your highness shall have the pleasure of looking on your heir."

Of course, neither of the two for a moment believed in the possibility of their promises being fulfilled. Imagine, then, their horror and astonishment when the Lady Margaret informed her husband that she was likely to become a mother. The news came upon the conspirators like a thunderclap. Prince Gunther was delighted, and attributed it to the wonderful skill of Nathan Mira, the Portuguese. Many and frequent were the consultations held between Nesmer, Mira, and Van Pratt ; Janos, Renard, and Abraham Geld were also admitted to their councils.

It was evident to all of them that the birth of an heir would upset all their schemes. A plan of action was determined on. The time arrived when the ~~Lady~~

Margaret expected her confinement. Accordingly, a messenger is despatched by Solomon Nesmer to the other conspirators, to repeat to them the few words—
"The hour is come!"

We have seen that it resulted in their all hurrying to the castle. We have seen, also, that the unfortunate Viscount Camille was also going there; and we have seen on the diligence, travelling in the same direction, the three brothers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEATH CRY : A MYSTERY.

It is necessary to the story that we devote this chapter to a mysterious event which happened some nine months previous, and which threw the inmates of Monte Corro into the greatest terror and consternation.

The old Prince Gunther was passionately fond of his young and lovely wife. Her slightest word was law to him ; and it is even doubtful if he would not have relinquished even his favourite employment, alchemy, and the search of an elixir of life, for her sake.

Margaret, poor girl, was far too spirit-broken and wretched to care for anything. Although the stern, gloomy castle was agony to her naturally gentle spirit, she seldom cared to leave it, but lived on a monotonous, weary life.

Gunther was nearly always employed poring over cabalistic books in his study, or working laboriously with crucible, alembic, and retort in a gloomy cell he devoted to that purpose, in the central tower of the castle.

He never saw strangers, and although hospitality was not denied to travellers or others, who had occa-

sion to call at the castle, Gunther never appeared in the dining-hall during their presence. One evening, a tall, handsome cavalier knocked at the gate. He said he was a traveller and a stranger, and asked for the hospitality which, in Germany, is never refused.

Gunther, as usual, was busily at work in his laboratory, and the stranger was introduced into the great hall, where was the Lady Margaret and her ladies-in-waiting. The stranger, on entering, removed his hat and cloak, and bowing lowly to the princess and ladies, took his seat at the supper-table.

Margaret, on seeing his handsome features, gave a slight cry, and turned first pale and then red. Perhaps it was but a passing spasm, as the cavalier did not appear to recognise her, nor she him.

Gunther did not appear. The supper passed on, and the ladies having retired, the stranger was shown to his room, in the same wing of the castle as that of Margaret.

Gunther still worked on ; a lurid red light streamed from the window in the tower, telling the surrounding inhabitants that the lord of Monte Corro still toiled on at his impious labours.

Margaret was in the habit of taking a composing draught, which the doctor, Nathan Mira, declared necessary for her health ; and, sooth to say, she was glad of the deep, dreamless sleep it procured, for life to her was but a name.

The clock in the courtyard chimed two.

The stillness of death reigned over the great gloomy

The deep red glare beaming from the central tower was the only relief to the total darkness.

Suddenly there burst forth on the silence of the black night a loud and piercing cry—a cry of mortal agony, as if some strong spirit had left its mortal tenement for ever—a deep, loud, piercing shriek of pain, which filled every corner of the gloomy old pile, and winged far away in the blackness of the night over the surrounding country ; then all was silent.

Every one was awakened by that cry. Lights were seen hurrying to and fro, but the frightened domestics could discover nothing. The cry had seemed to pervade the whole castle, so that it was impossible to tell from what direction it came.

It was attributed to one of the evil spirits with which the lands of Monte Corro were supposed to be familiar. Gunther, doubtless, in the course of his unholy studies, had evoked a demon, who had thus shown his presence.

Pale and frightened, all again retired to rest—the stillness of the night was no more broken. In the morning, the room of the stranger was found vacant—he was gone.

The porter declared that no one had passed out ; the warder in charge declared that the drawbridge had never been lowered.

And yet the handsome young cavalier was gone.

In the room which he had occupied was found his sword. He had left it.

What had become of its wearer ?

It was brought to Prince Gunther and Margaret at the breakfast-table, in the hall—a small, thin

straight sword, such as was then worn by gentlemen of rank. The hilt was richly jewelled. Margaret asked Prince Gunther to be allowed to keep it. He had never refused her anything. Accordingly, she took it to her chamber, and it was seen no more.

What had become of its wearer ?

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN LEAH AND HER FATHER.

IN one of the ante-chambers which communicated with larger rooms in the castle of Monte Corro, were seated in earnest conversation a young girl of about seventeen, and an officer of Prince Gunther's guard. The young girl was Leah, the daughter of Abraham Geld.

The young officer appeared to be two years older, and was named Theodore Vanderpant. He was extremely handsome—almost too handsome for a man. His rich brown hair, parted in the centre, fell in wavy masses down each side of his face.

Leah was very beautiful; she was one of those dark, splendid beauties never seen but among Jewesses and the daughters of the South. Her large dark eyes seemed to look at you with a soft loving light, and her beautiful lips were always wreathed in smiles.

Theodore gazed frequently in her face with an obvious admiration, which brought a light crimson flush to her delicate cheek. Yet she did not seem displeased, but listened in silence, with downcast eyes, to the words which he ever and anon whispered in her ears. They were seated in a recess, which com-

manded a view of the courtyard of the castle. Leah, looking forth, said—

“There are two men on horseback just arrived. Go, see who they are, Theodore, and don’t stay here all night talking nonsense.”

Theodore rose and went out; and Leah followed his retreating figure with a look which he would have given worlds to have caught.

Shortly he returned, looking troubled and excited.

“It is your father, Leah, who has arrived from Frankfort, with another, whom I have never seen before, in the uniform of a Hungarian dragoon. I know not who he is. Both are now with Nathan Mira, Van Pratt, and Nesmer.”

“Nathan Mira and Van Pratt!” exclaimed the girl, clasping her hands in alarm. “Ah! then mischief is brewing. It bodes ill to our poor Lady Margaret and to my father, I fear.”

“Your father—why so?”

“I know not. I dread the very name of Nathan Mira. I know not that I have ever seen him, but I have heard much. There seems to be in my soul a sort of intuitive abhorrence of the man—a presentiment that he will yet work me grievous evil. Theodore, I dread and abhor him.”

“And yet he is one of your own people.”

“And all the more for that I fear him. A treacherous Jew is a more deadly enemy—more to be feared than a venomous reptile. This man has for years been in constant communication with my father. *I heard it from old Ruth; though, thanks be to*

Jehovah ! I saw him not. I will speak to my father on the subject. This vague terror appals me. Doubtless, he will soon be here."

"Here he comes, now," said Theodore, as he saw the figure of the old man, following a servant, advance towards them. "I will leave you now."

The next moment Leah was clasped in her father's arms. The old man almost sobbed with joy as he felt his beautiful, his cherished Leah, once more in his embrace.

"Leah—my own Leah—you grow lovelier every day. Who was that young man who just now left you ?"

"That, father," said Leah—a rich crimson dyeing her olive cheek for a moment—"that was one of the officers of Prince Gunther's guard."

"Ah ! Leah," said Abraham, coaxingly, "he is not one of our people. Be not too susceptible—you are lovely as a poet's dream. Holy patriarchs ! if aught should befall you !"

"Fear not for me, father," she said, haughtily, drawing her beautiful figure up, her dark eyes flashing, her lip curling scornfully. "Fear not for me, father ; Leah will never disgrace her name, or her nation, or her religion."

"I believe thee—I believe thee, my beautiful child," he said, caressing her fondly.

"But thou, father—thou—be on thy guard ! What of this man, Mira—Nathan Mira ? My soul shudders at the name !"

"But, daughter, thou knowest not the man."

"I know him not, it is true," she replied, solemnly ;

"but, nevertheless, there is evil in him. Trust him not, although he be one of our people."

"My daughter, why these fears? I have business with Nathan. He has always been considered an upright man—a constant attendant at synagogue."

"They tell me," she replied, "that he, though well to do, will scarce keep his old father from actual starvation."

"I, too, have heard it, Leah; but believe it not, 'tis a calumny."

"Father, what is thy business with this man?" she asked, suddenly.

The old man faltered under her eagle glance.

"It is of business—of money. 'Tis too long a story to explain to thee, Leah. But, trust me, 'tis for thy good. I am here now that thou might be rich and powerful, that princes may kneel at thy feet, my daughter; that the beauty and the wealth of Leah, the Jewess, may ring throughout all Europe."

The old man's eyes blazed, and he trembled with excitement as he thus prophesied his daughter's future grandeur.

"Father, I thank thee for thy loving care," she said, her dark eyes now filling with tears. "I trust that thy love for me may not lead thee to be beguiled into evil by bad men."

"Fear not, my child."

"But I do fear," she replied, solemnly. "Last night I dreamed a dream—I dreamed that thou, Abraham Geld, was being led astray from the paths of virtue by greed of gold. I dreamed that bad men *should through thee work dire evil to the Lady Mar-*

garet, who, Christian though she be, I love as my own sister. I dreamed that wicked men were plotting murder and robbery, and that she, poor suffering angel, would come to harm through thee and thy companions."

"Leah! Leah!" interrupted the old man, in terrified tones. "Say not so. What I do is all for the best—for thee and thy sake. I must go now—must bid thee adieu."

"Father, remember my words."

"I will, I will, my daughter. Fear not."

"'Tis too late to draw back," he muttered to himself. "I cannot lose my hold on the estates. I am the lawful owner till the moneys I have advanced are repaid. Should a son be born to the house of Monte Corro, in the eye of God the property will be mine, not his. There can be no harm, no sin in possessing myself of my own. Oh, Leah! Leah! it is for thee I toil, and yet thy words weigh sorely on my mind."

He hurried back and joined Renard and the others, though not without much reproach of heart and fear.

CHAPTER X.

THE STAIN OF BLOOD—LEAH RELATES HER STORY.

PRESENTLY Theodore returned and asked her the result of her interview with her father, and what his coming with the others meant.

"Alas!" said Leah, sorrowfully, "I fear their coming bodes no good to poor Lady Margaret."

"What can it mean?" said Theodore. "Yesterday morning, when the princess was taken ill, Solomon Nesmer sent off Fritz, the courier, post haste to Frankfort."

"What does it mean?" replied the young girl. "It means more misery to our poor mistress; it means villany; it means a treacherous conspiracy on the part of Nesmer, Mira, and that oily ruffian, Van Pratt, against the poor lady lying ill, and her unborn child."

"Poor girl," said Theodore, "what a life of misery it is to her in this gloomy old castle, with no friends to love her or feel for her but ourselves. That old churl, her husband, though he is a prince, how she must hate him; and that rascally Nathan, and that Dutch quack, how hateful must their society be. How different was her life at home in Castle Blanche, with her sister Helen, and her three half-

brothers. But now the brave and noble Count Ulric is dead—died by the assassin's dagger; her sister is married to Viscount Camille, who lives in Paris; her three brave handsome brothers are outcasts from the home of their father; and she herself, poor girl, is married to an insane old dotard of seventy."

"Theodore," said Leah, earnestly, laying her small white hand on his arm, "there is mischief in the wind—I know it—I am sure she is in danger. Oh! where are her brothers, who should be here to protect her? Why have they deserted her at such a moment? It is too cruel!"

"How you talk, Leah! Do you not know that Prince Gunther does not acknowledge and will not allow them on the domain, much less in the castle? Do you not know that they are proscribed for their political offences, and are in all probability even now engaged in some desperate enterprise, which may cost them their life? Alas for them! I would willingly see them great and powerful; they deserve to be, for three nobler fellows never trod God's earth. No, Leah; Albert, Rudolph, and Ernest never have, never can, and never will cross the threshold of Monte Corro Castle."

"Theodore," said Leah, in a low voice, "what do you think of the old tradition? You know that Prince Gunther had been twice married before he took the Lady Margaret from her happy home as his bride. You know that neither of his wives realised his hopes of a heir. You know that he took to his unholy studies in the central tower. You know that this Dr. Mira and Van Pratt were then

installed in the castle. You know that shortly after he began to pursue these studies the Lady Margaret announced that she was likely to become a mother ; and you know that the current belief is, that he has invoked the aid of demons—that he has sold his soul on condition of his wife bearing him a heir. Once again, what do you think of the three Demons ? For ages the princes of Monte Corro have enjoyed a demoniacal reputation ; for ages they have borne three red men on their coat-of-arms, and the old family traditions say that the three demons of Monte Corro always appear when a death or a birth is about to take place, or when anything extraordinary is about to happen. Theodore, I feel sure that some dreadful calamity is about to happen ; I feel sure—I have a presentiment that the three demons will make their appearance, be it for weal or woe.”

“Leah, your imagination misleads you—you are too superstitious—’tis but an idle legend. Why should you believe such a foolish story as this of the three demons, or the Three Bastards of Monte Corro ?”

“Why should I believe it, Theodore ? I will tell you.” Leah lowered her voice, and said, tremblingly, “I believe in their existence *because I have seen them !*”

Theodore started and turned pale ; he was not timid, but Leah’s manner was so earnest and wild as to impress him painfully.

“Do you remember,” she said, “that night when we were aroused by that dreadful, piercing, agonizing

“Yes, I remember.”

"Lady Margaret then slept in the room to which this is the antechamber. By her desire, I slept here. A stranger arrived in the evening, and asked and received hospitality. He was a tall, dark, and very handsome young man. For a moment the Lady Margaret seemed to recognise him, and gave a slight cry ; but she must have been mistaken, as he gave no sign of knowing her.

"All retired to rest. I slept here, as I said before, and our mistress slept in the adjoining room. The bed was placed where it is now, in a recess. That recess, as you know, led into the oratory, where Margaret performed her devotions. The oratory was only a small, closet-like room, and there was *no way out of it*—there was not even a window, but it was lighted by wax candles, which the good Lady Margaret always kept burning at the Virgin's shrine. I retired to rest, and, being tired, soon fell asleep.

"I awoke suddenly with a start, I know not why. I saw a figure pass through the door from the antechamber, in which I was sleeping, into Lady Margaret's chamber. I thought my eyes must have deceived me, and while I was thinking and wondering, I again fell asleep. I know not how long I slept, when I was again aroused by a noise in the adjoining room. I arose and looked through the open door. The room was dimly lighted by a small oil lamp and by the light that shone through from the oratory. Lady Margaret was in a deep sleep ; she had taken a more powerful dose than usual ; she appeared to be slumbering profoundly—calmly. By the side of the bed I saw the figure of a man ; he had thrown off his cloak, and I

recognised the cavalier who came in the evening, and whom I had seen at supper. He had one knee on the bed, and appeared to be just rising from it.

"He gave a start, and turned his head towards the oratory. He seemed petrified with terror and astonishment at what he saw there, and remained motionless as a statue.

"I followed his glance with my eyes, and, Theodore, as true as there is a God in heaven, I saw standing in that recess, gazing sternly on the cavalier, three figures — three figures, with folded arms, long scarlet cloaks, and large slouched hats, with a black feather. They were—the three demons of Monte Corro !

"I gazed horror-struck, unable to move or even cry out from terror.

"Suddenly two of the figures started forward, but the third stopped them with an authoritative gesture, and advanced slowly round the foot of the bed towards the cavalier. Each of the figures in the long scarlet cloaks had swords ; the cavalier had none. The one who had advanced round the bed into the room threw off his cloak and hat, and drew his sword. Theodore, it seems almost impossible that the great God should allow such a thing to be, but I swear to you that the demon was as beautiful as an angel. He seemed to observe that the cavalier was unarmed, and reaching over the still sleeping Margaret, he took a sword from one of his companions, and handed it to the cavalier. They put themselves in attitude, and the keen blades whicked and gnashed against each other ; not a word ~~was~~ spoken. The other two stood motionless in the

recess with folded arms, regarding the contest calmly, as if they had no doubt as to the result.

"The only sound to be heard was the dreadful clashing of their swords and the stamping of their feet, as they closed in mortal conflict.

"At last, I saw the man with the red cloak pass his sword quickly under the other's guard. I *heard* the cruel steel hiss through the flesh. I saw the point come through at his back, between the shoulders, as the other plunged it in up to the very hilt.

"The unfortunate cavalier dropped his sword, and giving a fearful yell of agony, fell back. It was that dreadful cry that aroused the whole castle nine months ago.

"I saw the Lady Margaret start up, awakened by that horrible death-cry. I saw the victor withdraw his bloody sword from the body of the cavalier, who was writhing on the floor in the agonies of death. Then my sight grew dim, and I fainted. When I recovered, the three Demons were still there: one was seated on the bed apparently talking and soothing Margaret; the other was standing at the foot; while the third was on his knees, and appeared to be wiping up something on the floor with the skirt of his scarlet cloak. The curtains concealed him, so that Lady Margaret could not see his employment. The one who was seated on the bed bent over the Lady Margaret, and kissed her tenderly on the forehead; then rising, he advanced towards the door of the antechamber where I was. I fell back, and again fainted.

"When I regained my consciousness it was broad

daylight ; the sun streamed in through the lattice, lighting up every corner in the antechamber. I arose, and passed into Lady Margaret's room. She slept profoundly. There was nothing unusual in the room, everything appeared as it was the night before ; there were no demons, no dead body—all were gone. I said to myself, it must have been a dream—a phantom of my excited imagination—but *it was no dream*. Theodore, come with me."

He rose and followed her into the next room.

She continued—"As I passed over the place which I had seen the figure wiping up with his cloak, my foot slipped. I looked down, and saw the stain of blood ; the oak floor was still wet with it."

Leah grasped his arm, and pointing to the ground before them, said—"Look ! Theodore—look ! Do you see that ?"

He followed the direction of her finger, and saw on the polished oak floor a large black stain ; it seemed still moist.

"It is *the stain of blood !*" she continued. "For nine months it has been the same as the first morning I saw it ; nor have repeated washings and scourings caused it even to grow fainter. The stain of human blood can never be effaced."

Theodore gazed, horror-struck ; there could be no mistake, no deception—there was the broad, black stain of blood.

"Leah," he said, at last ; "have you ever seen the three bastards of Monte Corro ?"

"Never."

"Might it not have been the Lady Margaret's three

half-brothers you saw, and whom you imagined three demons?"

"Impossible; they could neither have entered nor left the castle without the consent of the prince. Besides, how could the body of the cavalier have been spirited away except by demons?"

"True—too true," said Theodore. "It must have been so."

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CHAPTER XI.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

THE dark red light still beamed from the central tower. In spite of the illness of his wife Margaret, and his hopes of a son, the old prince still toiled to discover the forbidden secrets of nature.

In Nathan Mira and Van Pratt he had willing assistants. The knowledge of Mira, the Portuguese, in medicine and drugs, was profound.

He knew how to distil essences, a small drop of which would paralyse the limbs, and strike down the strong man into a livid corpse.

He knew how to administer infinitesimal doses of deadly poisons, which, although appearing to do no immediate harm, should slowly and persistently dry up the fountains of life, and cause *death* as sure and inevitable as that produced by the more rapid poison.

He knew how to administer drugs which should send the patient into a deep, insensible, helpless sleep.

He knew others which would produce all the appearance of death, although a spark of life still remained in the corpse-like body.

He knew of poisons so deadly that one drop spilled on the floor of a room would, by its vapour alone, cause death to every living being who remained for

half an hour ; and he knew how to administer potions and elixirs which should, for a time, stimulate the feeble powers of life, and send the blood dancing through the veins of the old and decrepit, as if bright, sunny youth were returning to them ; for a time only, however, for it invariably happened that, after partaking of Dr. Mira's invigorating elixirs, a period of death-like depression ensued in proportion to the previous exhilaration.

Perhaps it was beyond his power to prevent this. Perhaps it was not his wish ; be that as it may, the only remedy for this reaction was more of the elixir. This would again send the blood dancing through the veins like molten metal till the effect of the dose was past, when it would return to the heart and *freeze*, leaving the body cold, weak, inanimate, corpse-like.

The doctor persuaded the old prince that this terrible and alarming depression, which always followed his elixir, was due to an imperfection in the manufacture ; an ingredient was wanting—that ingredient, and the secret of perfect manufacture, they were on the point of discovering—when the delightful glow, the feeling of youth, the high spirits, and the increased bodily vigour, would be permanent, and would go on increasing until he should have cast off his old, decrepit shape, and be again as he was at twenty-five, but handsomer, stronger, wealthier, *and immortal*.

Gunther was seated in an easy-chair, drawn close up to the fireplace. His crucible of molten metal boiled and bubbled, hissed and spluttered, as the blast from the bellows he occasionally worked increased the heat.

Nathan Mira and Van Pratt stood by, one on each side of his chair ; occasionally, one or the other would take a turn at the handle of the bellows, and work away till the fire was increased to a blinding, blazing, white heat.

Clank, clank, clank, went the machinery working the bellows, the blast roared up on the red-hot coals, and the contents of the crucibles bubbled and boiled in tumultuous confusion. It was a strange scene—the gloomy cell, with its array of mysterious apparatus. Furnaces, bottles, alembics, retorts, stills, batteries, a thousand strange and grotesque-looking vessels and contrivances ; piles of lead and other metal in pots, which were to be converted into gold ; heaps of charcoal and coke for the furnace ; quantities of rare herbs and costly drugs ; and tons of bottles and phials containing essences and elixirs, many of which had cost a hundred thousand crowns in the manufacture.

On a small table by the side of Mira were two or three very small phials.

Old Gunther had fallen back in his chair in the last stage of weakness and prostration ; and his lean, cadaverous body seemed scarcely to possess life. Were it not for his gasping breath, one might imagine it was a corpse on which the two associates were about to experiment.

His head lay back, and his hands drooped lifelessly on each side of the chair. A cold perspiration stood in beads on his pale, cadaverous face.

“The elixir ! the elixir ! good Mira,” he gasped, faintly.

The doctor took up one of the small phials. It contained about half an ounce of a colourless liquid. Removing the stopper, he allowed one drop to fall into a goblet of wine which stood on the table. He then took up another phial.

Gunther watched him with greedy and impatient eyes.

The second phial contained a dark, thick fluid matter; it was almost the consistency of treacle, and with difficulty could he cause a drop of the viscid compound to fall into the goblet.

As soon as he had finished, Gunther grasped it eagerly, and drained every drop of its contents.

The effect was instantaneous. Wonderful new life seemed infused into the old prince. His breath no longer came gaspingly and with difficulty; his thin hands no longer hung listlessly by his side; his hitherto pale, cadaverous face was illuminated by a bright flush; and his lack-lustre eyes gleamed with a strange sparkling light under the influence of the powerful elixir.

"Thanks, good doctor—thanks," he said. "I feel new life in me already. But why is it that the effect of our wonderful elixir is so transitory—that shortly I am thrown into a state of greater prostration than before—that my limbs refuse to move at my bidding, my dim eyes refuse to see, and my recreant tongue almost refuse to speak?"

"It is because we are not perfect in manipulation," was the reply; "because there is yet another ingredient to be added before the wondrous effects will be permanent."

"When will it be complete?" said Gunther. "When will my hopes be realized? When shall I reap the benefit of my nights and days of toil?"

All this time he was working energetically at the handle of the bellows. The furnace roared and blazed as the stream of air was forced through the glowing coal; the caldrons and crucibles bubbled and hissed loudly, and the alembics poured forth their vapour into the receivers, where it was condensed in glittering drops, which trickled down the sides of the vessel; these drops, as they accumulated, were carefully drawn off into phials, and placed on one side for future processes. They were to form part of the wonderful water of immortality—the elixir vitæ.

Van Pratt and Mira exchanged glances before answering the prince's question.

The great clock of Monte Corro chimed ten.

Doctor Mira waited till the last dull boom of the sound had died away, and answered solemnly and impressively—

"This very night, Prince of Monte Corro, you shall reap the reward of months of labour. This night you shall drink of the perfected essence; this night a draught of the wonderful elixir shall give you health, youth, beauty. This night you shall know the dread secret of death, and drink of the waters of immortality."

Gunther's eyes glared with wild delight.

"And the gold, bright, glittering gold?" he continued.

"This night," said Van Pratt, "we shall know the secret. This night you shall have the power to

transmute all those dull, heavy lumps of lead into the bright, yellow, glittering gold. This night you shall be richer than Croesus, more powerful than the autocrat of Russia !”

Again old Gunther’s eyes glared with a wild, delirious joy.

“And my son, my heir ?” he again asked.

“This night,” said Mira, “an heir shall be born to the princely house of Monte Corro. This night the Lady Margaret shall be eased of her pains. This night Prince Gunther of Monte Corro shall look on his son.”

Gunther seated himself, and leaned back in his chair ; the effect of the elixir had gone off again ; the cold sweat stood on his forehead, and the bright flush of joy and excitement faded away into a deadly, ghastly pallor.

“The elixir !—the elixir ! good Mira,” he cried. “I faint—I die !”

The doctor slowly and carefully mixed another dose from the phials.

This time, however, he gave but half a drop of the clear liquid, and two full drops of the thick viscid fluid in the other phial. Gunther again drained the goblet. It revived him, and the deadly pallor left his thin, cadaverous face, and was succeeded by a more healthy colour. He leaned his head back, and closing his eyes, fell into a sleep that resembled that of the dead.

Nathan Mira waited till he slept, and said in a low voice—“Half-past ten ; it is time they were here.”

“Abraham Geld and Janos have arrived,” said Van Pratt. “Renard cannot be long.”

"Old Abraham Geld is always the first where there is a prospect of gold."

"I care not," said Van Pratt, "if they do not come at all ; we can do the business without them."

"Renard is a deep, cunning fellow," said Mira ; "and Janos is like a tiger in his fury. He is a good man when wanted ; and the old Jew has found the money hitherto."

"True," replied Van Pratt ; "but we want no more of his money, we can do without him ; and as for Renard, he is cunning, but a coward. Janos, though brave as a lion, likes not our way of doing business ; he is all for the clashing steel, and the barking, noisy pistols. If we three, you, I, and Nesmer, could do without them, we should have a double share of the spoil—a third of this vast estate instead of a sixth."

"True," replied Mira ; "if we could do without their aid it would be to our advantage ; but *they know too much*. Renard is crafty as a fox. Abraham Geld will not let such booty slip through his fingers without a struggle ; and Janos, who will dare brave his anger ? Why, the tiger would take either of us by the throat and run his sword through us with as little compunction as he would spit a sparrow. Besides, we may have trouble with the old man's daughter, the girl Leah. You say she is passionate and hot-blooded ; and we all know how insanely Abraham loves her."

"Ah!—bah !" was the reply ; "we know how to deal with these fire-eaters ; and as for the old man and his daughter, we need fear nothing. There is

more than one way of ridding oneself of an enemy, as you and I know, good Nathan Mira."

The old prince tossed uneasily in his chair, and seemed about to awake. He muttered in his sleep, and threw his hands helplessly about. They were silent until he once again dozed off.

"What of the Lady Margaret?" said Van Pratt, in a low tone.

"She is ill—very ill; as ill as we could wish. Nature will, I think, save us much trouble, for unless she soon rallies, she must sink into a deeper sleep than even her old husband."

"Nature assists us?" said Van Pratt, meaningly. "You mean rather the potions and lotions of the Doctor Nathan Mira, which the good lady has been taking this twelvemonth."

"Well, well, my friend; we will not dispute about trifles. No matter how or why, Lady Margaret will die—and die this night."

"But what about a child? Suppose it is a boy?"

"By the law of Germany the compact will be null and void, and he will be heir to the estates," Mira replied. "Skill and science remove all obstacles. It is impossible to say the exact hour, or whether the child will be male or female; one thing is certain—Lady Margaret gives birth to a son or daughter, and dies to-night."

"And that son or daughter?"

"Van Pratt," said Mira, slowly, and looking steadily in his face, "we have risked much in this undertaking, and have spared neither time nor trouble; we must

reap the reward. To accomplish our end, we must resort to any means—you understand?"

Van Pratt leaned forward and whispered a few words interrogatively. Mira bowed his head. A knocking was heard at the door.

"Who is there?" said Van Pratt.

"It is I, Solomon Nesmer."

Mira rose, and drawing back the bolts, opened the heavy door, and admitted the steward of Monte Corro.

Nesmer's eyes fell on the apparently lifeless form of the prince.

"What, dead?" he exclaimed.

"Not yet," replied Mira, calmly. "What news, Nesmer?"

"The Lady Margaret——" he began.

"Is worse?" interrupted Van Pratt.

"Yes, worse, far worse—dying."

"Good!" said Mira, with a satanic smile.

"She has sent for Leah Geld," continued Nesmer.

Nathan Mira started to his feet, overturning a chair, which fell against Prince Gunther.

"Perdition!" he exclaimed, violently, "this will never do. Why did you not tell me before? It will ruin all if that girl sees her. Come with me, good Solomon, and see that no one has access to the Lady Margaret. Say, that her medical attendant has forbidden it; that any excitement would be dangerous, if not fatal—anything, anything, but Leah Geld, must not see her even for a moment; that girl will ruin all. They say she is devotedly attached to the Lady Margaret, and would endeavour to frustrate her own father in any design prejudicial to her."

Mira and Nesmer hurriedly left the room. The old prince still slept. The dull glare of the expiring embers threw a ghastly, gloomy glare on his cadaverous face and attenuated body. He seemed like a hideous corpse torn from the grave, and seated in dreadful mockery at the scene of his impious labours!

CHAPTER XII.

THE PACKET AND KEY.

LEAN GELD and Theodore Vanderpant were seated in the room where she narrated to him the scene she witnessed nine months ago in Lady Margaret's chamber. They conversed together in low, muttered tones. Theodore could not shake off the superstitious dread with which Margaret's strange narrative had inspired him.

A female domestic entered hastily.

"Mademoiselle Geld," she said, "for the love of Heaven, come to the Lady Margaret. She is worse—dying—and calls continually for you. Doctor Mira left orders that no one was to be admitted; but she is continually calling your name, and reproaching you for leaving her in her extremity."

Loah started up; tears streamed down her beautiful face.

"Alas, my poor mistress!" she said, "yours is a sad lot: surrounded by these harpies and adventurers, with none near you whom you can love or trust. Yes," she added, "I will come—I will see her—I have been kept from her long enough by these unprincipled people."

"Pray be careful, mademoiselle," said the girl;

"Mira and the Dutchman, Van Pratt, threatened us that Prince Gunther would hang from the walls any one who dared attempt to see Lady Margaret without their permission."

"Ha!" exclaimed Theodore, passionately; "dare they threaten? This must be attended to. Wait a little, Leah; I will put it out of the power of these ruffians to molest you." He went to the window and shouted to the sentinel on duty in the courtyard—

"Without there! Sergeant of the guard, turn out your men, and attend me in the great corridor."

The tramp of armed men was soon heard ascending the stairs. They halted outside.

Theodore took Leah by the hand and led her outside.

"You will conduct this lady," he said to the sergeant, "to the chamber of the Lady Margaret; see that she is not persecuted or molested. You will then wait in the corridor for her return, and escort her wherever she wishes."

The sergeant saluted, and Leah hastened to the chamber of Lady Margaret, followed at a respectful distance by the soldiers of the guard. Nor was the precaution needless.

Leah was admitted instantly, without question or cavil. In a few minutes she reappeared with pale, troubled face, and agitated manner, carrying a packet and a key in her hand. Followed by the guard, she hastened back to the room in which she had left the young officer.

"Theodore," she said, earnestly, "you must find a

trusty messenger. Can you trust any of the mounted troopers?"

He considered for a moment, and said—

"There is Claude, who is an old vassal of the murdered Ulric; he would lay down his life for the Lady Margaret or her half-brothers."

"Thanks, thanks; that will do," she said, excitedly. "Send for him at once. I must return to the poor lady, who is, I fear, dying."

Theodore approached the casement in order to call for Claude the chasseur. He started back in astonishment.

"Leah," he cried, "look!"

She came to the window. The moon was shining brightly on the battlements and towers of the gloomy pile; *the courtyard was one glistening white sheet of snow.*

"Theodore!" she exclaimed, solemnly, "it was just such a night as this when I saw the three demons and the cavalier in the prince's chamber. It was July, but there was a sudden and extraordinary fall of snow." She laid her hand on his arm, and continued—"The old legend of Monte Corro says, that the three demons of Monte Corro always appear at a birth or a death in the family of Monte Corro. I feel—I know—*they will come to-night!*"

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

Theodore left the room to give instructions to Claude, the chasseur, and Leah hastened back to the chamber of Lady Margaret.

The guard, who were awaiting outside, again accompanied her. As she was about entering the sick

chamber, Nathan Mira approached with Solomon Nesmer, the steward. He regarded the young girl at first with astonishment, but this quickly merged into a bold gaze of unqualified admiration at her great beauty. His look was full of rude confidence, and his eye swept her form as though he had already marked her down as his own. Leah coloured up with wounded modesty and indignation, not unmingled with fear. But she remembered that she was not unprotected, and that her father was even now in the castle.

"No one is to enter the chamber of the Lady Margaret," he said.

Leah replied, "The Lady Margaret has sent for me, and I must attend her." She laid her hand on the handle of the door.

Mira started forward and laid his hand rudely on her arm, exclaiming—

"I tell you, mademoiselle, you cannot enter. I declare it is dangerous to her health to see any person, and the slightest excitement would be fatal."

Leah gave a slight cry; Mira attempted to drag her by force from the door.

"Stand back!" said the sergeant of the guard, "and allow the lady to pass."

"She shall not pass!" said Mira, angrily. "It is my orders, and Prince Gunther's orders, that no one has access to the sick-room."

He still endeavoured to prevent Leah entering.

"Soldiers!" cried the sergeant, "do your duty—remove that man."

Two soldiers advanced and laid hold of Mira.

They dragged him away without compunction, paying no heed to his threats and remonstrances.

Leah passed in, and the door closed behind her.

"You shall repent this," exclaimed the infuriated doctor; "I will have you all shot for this outrage and disobedience of orders."

"We have not disobeyed orders," replied the sergeant. "We received orders from our lieutenant to conduct Mademoiselle Geld to the Lady Margaret's chamber, and allow no one to molest her. We must execute those orders, and can take no countermand from any one but our officer or Prince Gunther."

Mira hurried off to Prince Gunther, who still lay in a death-like sleep. The soldiers stood in a semicircle round the door, to await the return of Mademoiselle Geld.

Leah reappeared, carrying in her hand a packet and a key. She was weeping.

"I trust, mademoiselle," said the sergeant, "that villain did not hurt you when he so rudely endeavoured to drag you from the door?"

"No, no!" she replied; "it is not that; it is the Lady Margaret I weep for. She is dying"—again the tears poured down the beautiful face. "Pray see that I am not again molested till I have executed our mistress's dying wishes. I am afraid of that doctor; his looks frighten me."

"Do not be alarmed, mademoiselle; neither Doctor Mira nor any one else shall injure you without first passing over our dead bodies. Eh, comrades! what say you?" The soldiers smiled grimly, and some significantly tapped the butt-end of their muskets.

Leah Geld was beloved by all for her beauty and sweet, gentle disposition; while all hated the crafty Nathan, and many would have rejoiced to send a bullet through his brain.

Leah, still accompanied by her guard, delivered the packet and the key to Theodore, who was waiting her return.

As he left to deliver them, with instructions to Claude, the chasseur, Doctor Mira himself entered. He bore in his hands a paper. He was pale with rage, for he knew that Leah had again seen the poor dying woman.

"Sergeant," he said, "here are the written orders of Prince Gunther." He showed the paper.

It was to the effect that a guard should be placed over the door of Lady Margaret's chambers, and no one be allowed to enter without an order from himself or the physician.

"Very good," said the sergeant; "the prince's orders shall be obeyed."

At this moment Theodore returned. Leah looked at him inquiringly; in reply he simply bowed his head.

Mira detected the look and the reply.

"Lieutenant Vanderpant," he said, "you are the officer in charge of the guard and the drawbridge?"

"I am," was the reply.

Mira showed another paper with Prince Gunther's signature.

"Here is the prince's orders, that no one be allowed to leave the castle without a special order; that the drawbridge be raised; and that no person, under any pretence whatever, be allowed to leave."

Theodore hesitated, and seemed in doubt; Leah looked dismayed and frightened, and gazed anxiously in his face. *The packet and letter had not gone.* At this moment the clatter of hoofs was heard in the courtyard, and a horseman dashed out of the castle and over the drawbridge at a gallop. It was Claude, the chasseur.

Theodore brightened up, and bowing to Mira, said—

“Prince Gunther shall be obeyed.” Then going to the window, he shouted to the seneschal, who was dozing at his post, “Raise the drawbridge and close the portcullis! Allow no one to enter or leave without an order from Prince Gunther or myself.”

“Who was that horseman who just passed out?” said Mira, hurriedly.

“Claude,” said Theodore; “one of the troopers.”

“For what purpose has he left?—who sent him? How dare he leave without Prince Gunther’s orders?”

“He left by my direction,” replied the young officer. “I despatched him before I received the prince’s commands to let no one leave. As to the purpose for which I sent him, that, Doctor Nathan Mira, is my affair, not yours.”

Theodore looked triumphant, as also did Leah.

Mira looked closely at Leah. He suspected that she had given something to the courier. He said nothing, however, but he knew that for the time he was baffled.

At this moment a loud knocking was heard at the iron gate. He hastened from the room, to see who had arrived.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VOW OF VENGEANCE.

WE must now take our readers about a mile on the road from Olenburg to Monte Corro.

Three horsemen are riding swiftly towards the castle, which may be dimly discerned ahead in the darkness of the night. They are all handsome young men, and wear scarlet cloaks and large slouched hats, with black feathers ; long swords hang by their sides, and they have pistols in their holsters.

It is easy to see by their excited manner, and the foam which covered their tired horses, that it is no pleasure excursion on which they are bent.

Arriving at the foot of the first hill, they gallop furiously up the road leading to the castle, not slackening their pace in the least, although their horses are almost blown. As they arrive within a hundred yards of the castle, they see a horseman dash forth at a gallop, and immediately afterwards they hear the rattling of chains ; the heavy drawbridge is drawn up, and the portcullis thunders down with a loud clang.

They rein in their horses, and gaze after the retreating figure of the horseman, who is speeding away almost invisible in the darkness of the night.

The snow had ceased falling, but the ground for miles around was one broad, white sheet.

"It is useless demanding admission by the drawbridge," said one; "there is some new devilry at work now, or it would not be raised, and the portcullis lowered, when the Lord of Monte Corro is at peace with all."

"True," replied another, turning his horse's head back; "but drawbridge or no drawbridge, we must gain admittance by fair means or foul; so follow me, my brothers, we will even thread the gloomy depth of the old tunnel, and force our way up by the vaults we know so well."

So saying, he put spurs to his horse, and galloped down the hill, followed by the other two. Passing close to the hideous chasm, they rode swiftly down the steep slope, and turning quickly to the right, advanced cautiously into the gloomy cave which formed the mouth of the tunnel.

It was nearly dark, so that they were obliged to feel their way slowly and carefully. Their tired horses ever and anon stumbled over large pieces of rock, and, in some cases, nearly into pools of water and shallow pits. Their riders, however, seemed to know their way, and advanced surely, though slowly. They had penetrated about half the length of the tunnel, when one of the horses started on one side, and snorting violently, refused to proceed, nor could all the efforts of his rider compel him. He seemed to see some object in the road before him, and trembled all over.

■ *The other two horses were some fifty paces in*

advance. Their riders shouted back to their companion, who had dismounted—

“What is the matter, Rudolph? Forward! This is no time for delay; our sister requires our presence; she is perhaps even now in fear and peril, so onwards to the rescue.”

“There is a dead man in the road,” said Rudolph, who had now had time to examine the object which had alarmed the horse.

“Never mind if there are fifty bodies. Forward! again, I say. It is the living we must care for, the dead are past all aid.”

“I must see into this,” replied Rudolph. “I have a feeling that it concerns us.”

Accordingly he struck a light, and lit a small taper, which he produced. Kneeling by the side of the corpse, he proceeded to examine the features. It was so fearfully crushed as to be almost unrecognisable. A small locket was lying on his breast, suspended by a gold chain. Rudolph touched a spring, and it flew open, revealing the portrait of a beautiful young female. He gave an exclamation of surprise and dismay, and an expression of deep grief was on his face.

“Alas! poor sister Helen. Is it thus that all your hopes of happiness with the brave and noble man you love are to be crushed? Must you also drink of the bitter cup which Margaret has drained to the dregs? Is it thus, oh brave, loyal Camille—friend—brother—that you have perished!” Rudolph raised his clenched hand to heaven. “If, as I suspect, you have been foully murdered—as was our poor

father—by your mangled corpse I swear, by the thunder of God, you shall be fearfully avenged!”

Then raising the head of the dead man, he imprinted on the pale, bleeding brow, a tender kiss, and taking the cold, lifeless hand, said—

“Adieu for ever! Raymond Camille. It is not thus I thought to have met my sister’s husband.”

He mounted his horse, and rejoined his companions, who were impatiently awaiting him.

Few words were spoken, and those in low, muttered tones; then his two companions also raised their clenched hands, and from the gloomy depths of the cavern a solemn oath of vengeance rose up to heaven!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HEIR OF MONTE CORRO.

RENARD was conducted by Mira to Solomon Nesmër's private apartments, where the other conspirators, Janos, Van Pratt, Abraham Geld, and the steward, were already assembled.

Mira left them, and returned to the tower where he had left Prince Gunther.

The old prince had just aroused himself from the deep lethargic slumber in which the potion had plunged him. He had rearranged his crucibles, and was working at the bellows-handle, blowing the smouldering embers into a flame. His eyes still glared with a greedy light, as with tottering steps he moved about the room for the various essences and materials he required. His limbs trembled, and his hands shook as he poured the contents of various phials into a large retort. Altogether, he seemed in the last stage of weakness and decay.

"Welcome, good Mira," he muttered, faintly. "How long you have been! Help me with this jar; it contains a wonderful compound made by the skilful Van Pratt, and is the only ingredient wanting to transmute all that dull, heavy lead into bright shining gold!"

Mira took hold of one handle of the jar, while Gunther took the other. They carried it across the room, and proceeded to raise it on a level with the crucibles on the furnace. Gunther was unequal to the exertion, and, dropping the handle, fell back exhausted in his chair. Mira completed the operation alone, and then turned towards the prince.

He lay back in his chair fainting and gasping for breath. Perspiration trickled down his cadaverous face, and his eyes rolled in agony. A strange smile flitted over Mira's crafty face.

"The elixir! the elixir!—for the love of God, the elixir!" gasped the old man, in his agony.

Mira turned to the table, and slowly and deliberately compounded it in a large goblet, and poured it into a small flask which was standing near. This time, however, he used more phials than the two he had before chosen. In addition to the clear liquid and the thick viscid substance, he added some drops from various other phials with strange labels and characters, which none but he could decipher.

Gunther was too far gone to observe his motions, but held forth his hand feebly and imploringly for the desired draught.

Mira poured out some into a goblet, and placed it to his lips. He drank it greedily. The effect was, as before, almost magical. The blood again flushed his pale cheek, new fire came to his eyes, and his limbs seemed to regain all their strength.

"Thanks!" he cried—"thanks! It is indeed a wonderful potion; but how is it, good Mira, that it *ever happens that* shortly after I have taken it the

spasms return with renewed violence? Why is it that the effects are not lasting, but die away and give place to agonies which I sometimes think those of death?"

"It is the one ingredient which is wanting," said Mira.

"But you said it should be supplied to-night?"

"And so it shall," replied the doctor. "Behold!" And he held up a small, a very small phial. "It is here. This is the great discovery for which you have so long toiled. This shall make you as handsome as Adonis, strong as Hercules, and immortal!"

Gunther's eyes blazed with wild delight.

"Immortal!" he exclaimed again and again—"immortal! Glorious news! wonderful discovery! Give it me, good Mira—let me drink."

"Not yet; it is not yet time. Science informs me that it must not be administered till the effects of the other potion have nearly vanished."

"And my wife—my promised heir?"

"You shall look upon the heir of Monte Corro within an hour," replied Mira, "and the Lady Margaret is progressing favourably."

"Let me go to her; assist me, good Mira. Wretch that I am to desert her in this hour."

Gunther arose, and, taking Mira's arm, passed out of the room, and they made their way to the wing of the castle where was the Lady Margaret's chamber.

As they passed along the corridor, the frightened domestics gazed with horror on the strange figure of the prince—his wild expression, the triumphant flush

on his cheek, and the blazing light that shone from his sunken eyes.

As they approached the chamber a female domestic emerged, and was almost passing on, when Gunther stopped her.

"What news of the Lady Margaret?" he asked.

"Your highness is the father of a son; but the Lady Margaret is ill, very ill, and cries continually for Mademoiselle Geld."

Mira's face grew livid, and his brow black as thunder, as he heard of the birth of an heir; but, composing himself—

"Mademoiselle Geld must not be admitted under any pretence whatever," he said to the sergeant who guarded the door; "it is dangerous to the patient's health."

"Certainly," said the prince; "no one must be admitted. See that Dr. Mira's orders are carried out."

The sergeant said nothing, but bowed his head in token of assent.

Mira and Gunther passed into the room, and approached the couch of the Lady Margaret.

She lay back almost fainting. Her beautiful eyes were half closed, and the breath passed almost imperceptibly from her open lips—once so red and ripe in their beauty, now so pale and death-like. Her hands were folded in meek resignation on her bosom.

"Margaret!—Speak to me," said Gunther—"say you will not die and leave your old husband, who loves you as his life."

Margaret opened her eyes, and gave a faint smile. The colour began to reappear on her pale cheek.

The worst was over.

Mira looked on gloomily at these signs of recovery.

"I must go and prepare a composing draught."

He was about leaving the room, when Gunther stopped him.

"Had I not better have a guard placed over the child?" he asked.

"On no account whatever," said Mira, hastily; "it would be fatal to the invalid. Even the guard outside must be dismissed; their heavy tramp will prevent that refreshing sleep which is her only chance of life."

Gunther, who had implicit faith in Mira, came to the door of the chamber and gave the requisite order.

The soldiers, with sullen, discontented looks, obeyed, and their heavy tramp was heard down the corridor as they went to their quarters. Then all was silent.

Gunther advanced to the cradle in the recess of the oratory, and gazed in delight on his sleeping heir.

The effect of Mira's elixir was now again fading away, and poor old Gunther's feeble frame began to feel the premonitory symptoms of the reaction, that agonizing spasm, which so utterly prostrated him.

He seated himself in a chair, and leaning back, exclaimed, "The elixir! the elixir, good Mira!—I faint—I die. Surely the time has now arrived."

The perspiration now again streamed down his face, and his whole frame trembled with the intensity of the attack. He seemed as if he must faint or die. His thin, cadaverous face grew from white into that livid hue which distinguishes the dead, and even his nails and finger ends participated in the deadly shade.

Mira watched him carefully. It was evident he could not survive the attack unless immediate relief was afforded. Accordingly, Mira, who was not yet ready for the *dénouement*, administered to him a very sparing dose of the cordial in the flask—be it observed, he gave none of the liquid in the small phial, which he had asserted wanted the one ingredient for perfect success. This again revived him, but not in so marked a manner as previously, and Mira left the room ostensibly for the purpose of compounding the perfect elixir he had promised.

Instead, however, of returning to the bottles, retorts, and all the mysterious apparatus in the Demon's Tower, as it was called, he went direct to the apartment of Solomon Nesmer, the steward.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

HE found all the four associates at supper with Solomon. They had just concluded the meal, and were toasting each other in Prince Gunther's best wine. On the arrival of Mira, Nesmer ordered the attendants to leave the room, and produced a heavy, iron-bound book.

Renard drew closer to him, and Abraham Geld rose and placed himself immediately behind, so that he could see over his shoulder. Van Pratt did not move; but, although he pretended indifference, did not fail to keep his eye stedfastly on the big book. Janos alone really seemed indifferent; filling his glass with wine, he drained it off and said—

“I know nothing of accounts or books; but, by the soul of my father! if any man attempt to rob me of my share in this undertaking, or to take more than his own, I will have his heart's blood, or my name is not Janos.”

And he looked so fierce and determined that few would have cared to attempt it.

“Gentlemen,” said Nesmer, “I am now prepared to lay before you a statement of the estate, revenues, money, and all particulars of the great property we are

to divide. The accounts are here; roughly speaking, there will soon be available a sum of ready money equal to nearly fifteen million crowns, and the yearly income from the estates, farms, forests, and the revenues from the towns and villages, will be about eight hundred thousand a year."

"Wait a bit," said Mira; "let us decide finally on a plan of action."

"Certainly," said Renard. "Good!" said Van Pratt; Janos merely nodded, and Abraham said nothing.

"You are all aware," said Nesmer, "of the contract I and good Abraham Geld have made with Prince Gunther. You are all aware that the prospect of the prince having a son born to him seriously jeopardizes our interests, as, if such a thing should happen, it would render our contract null and void. Of course you are aware that, as long as the prince or his wife survive, we cannot obtain possession of that for which we have so long toiled; therefore, if a son is born this night, there will be three between us and our desires."

Mira was silent, although he knew that what they so much dreaded had already happened.

They exchanged glances. Van Pratt was stolid and indifferent; Renard looked from under his eyes; Abraham threw up his hands and eyes in dismay. None liked to speak first.

"What detained you, M. Renard?" said Mira, to break the silence.

"Oh!" he replied, "nothing particular. I had a *little adventure*. A fellow attempted to quarrel with

me, and I was obliged to remain behind. You understand," he said, in an off-hand, boastful manner, tapping the hilt of his sword.

"Was Janos a witness of the encounter?" inquired Nesmer. "Did he assist you, or were you alone?"

"No, I was not there; I had nothing to do with it," said Janos, scornfully. "I know nothing of the brave Renard's style of killing, nor do I like it."

"O Lord! O Lord!" cried the Jew, "did you kill the man?"

Renard made no reply; but, addressing himself to Nesmer, said—

"Well, good Solomon, proceed with your statement of the affairs of Monte Corro. How much money is there at present? When shall we receive anything from the estates and property, and what necessity is there for delay?"

"The coffers of Monte Corro are very low at present. Nathan's elixirs are costly, and Van Pratt does not fail to draw large sums for the prosecution of his wonderful processes for turning all metals into gold."

"Yes," said Mira, sipping wine slowly from a goblet; "but when you talk of the costliness of my elixirs, you must remember you could ill do without them—that without my aid you would have a poor chance of succeeding in your endeavours."

"And as to the money for my experiments," said Van Pratt, with a mocking smile, "you must also please to remember that even now the wonderful crucible is on the furnace, which will convert all the piles

of lead into ingots—every nail on the portecullis and chain on the drawbridge into gold.”

“Pshaw!” said Nesmer; “don’t talk such nonsense to us; we are not such fools as he is; we know how much your wonderful experiments are worth.”

“Well,” retorted the other, “at least you must acknowledge that, but for me and my experiments, which you seem to despise, Prince Gunther would never have signed the compact—that but for the hope of discovering the secret, he would not have mortgaged his estates, or signed the contract by which Abraham Geld and ourselves are to be enriched.”

“True,” said the old Jew, in faltering tones; “but remember also that it was my gold—my hard-earned money—which supplied the heavy demands made by the prince; that it was for my gold that he signed the deeds, and that the estates are mine, and my daughter Leah’s, when I have paid you all the stipulated sum. It was I, too, who supplied the money necessary for present purposes.”

“The estate yours!” said Nesmer.

“Mine—mine—yes, mine!” said the old man; “mine by deed and bond.”

“Have a care, old man, that in trying to rob us, your friends, of our just rights, you do not lose all—a very few words would invalidate your claim. We can do it, and——”

“None of your quarrels,” interrupted Renard; “and in the meantime I must not be forgotten, nor my friend Janos either. But for me, this night an enemy would have been in the castle, who would have upset *all*.”

"Yes, yes; that is all very well also," said Janos; "but I don't like your style, Sir Renard. I should like to know to whom you look for assistance when there is any real work to be done—when a strong arm and a stout heart are required."

"Do you know, chevalier, when it was necessary to remove a certain person from our path, who it was that attacked and slew him?"

"Peace, peace!" cried Abraham Geld, throwing up his hands, "peace, thou man of blood; I call Heaven to witness that I am a peaceable man, and know naught of the desperate doings of you violent sons of war."

"And yet," said Van Pratt, "you do not object to divide the skin, after some one else has slain the wolf."

"Come, come, my friends, enough of this," interrupted the steward. "No one wishes to rob any of you of your just share of glory or profit; let each of us do our part without quarrelling. The prey is not yet dead, so it is over soon to wrangle as to who hunted it down. All have helped in the work. The gold of Abraham Geld, the elixirs of Nathan the Jew, the wonderful secrets of gold-making of Van Pratt, the strong arm and sharp sword of Janos, and the skill and perseverance of myself, the steward of this great domain, have all contributed their share. So let us drink, 'Health and prosperity to the future masters of Monte Corro—ourselves.'"

The flagons were filled and the toast drunk. As the last echoes died away, and before they reseated themselves, there was heard, as though from one corner of the room, a burst of mocking laughter. It seemed in

the air. All heard it distinctly, but none could say whence it came. The associates gazed in each other's faces in mute consternation, then they turned their faces to the quarter of the room whence it seemed to proceed. Renard especially was very pale; he remembered that dreadful cry which ran out, as the unfortunate Raymond Camille disappeared in the gloomy depths of the chasm. He thought it was the murdered man's spirit which thus laughed to scorn their boastful rejoicings.

Abraham Geld, Mira, Van Pratt, and even the bold Janos, could not shake off the effect of that mysterious laughter. The hitherto noisy assemblage was now as quiet as the grave. They heard the wind moaning without, but that was all.

The lamps threw but a dim glare over the vast apartment, and their imaginations peopled the darker part of the room with spirits—vengeful, vindictive, relentless. Renard looked anxiously in the faces of the others, and said—

“What was it, good Nesmer? Are any of the domestics in the room? Or is there any closet or passage behind the tapestry?”

“There is a closet and passage which leads up behind the grand corridor, but it has been closed for years,” said Nesmer.

He rose, and with faltering steps advanced to the corner from whence the sound appeared to proceed. Janos followed with his drawn sword in his hand. Nesmer touched a spring, and a small door in the wainscoting flew open. He still, however, hesitated to advance.

"Go on," said Janos, who now appeared to have recovered his nerve.

Nesmer still hesitated, and the Hungarian snatched the light from his hand and dashed into the closet. It was empty. The door at the end was closed, and seemed not to have been opened for years.

"There is no one here!" he cried, in astonishment. "No one."

Reassured by his words, the others advanced cautiously and looked into the closet. It was, as Janos said, empty. The door which led from it was closed and barred by several bolts, and covered with dust and cobwebs.

"No one could have been here," said the steward, examining it carefully; "there is no other way out but by this door, which leads into a passage to the grand corridor. It has not been opened for years, nor could the strength of any one man draw back the rusty bolts."

The others examined it, and were obliged to admit the truth of Nesmer's words. Janos said, "Let us return and think no more of it. It must have been either fancy or some of the domestics in the courtyard, or those drunken troopers in the guard-room, drinking to the departed heir of Monte Corro."

None but Mira knew yet that a son was born to the old prince. They reseated themselves, and strove to disperse their fears, talking loudly and boisterously, and laughing with an exaggerated appearance of mirth. Nathan drank little or nothing, but appeared at times in deep thought. As for the steward, he pored over his account-book, and

appeared to be busy adding up. Abraham Geld did not attempt to disguise his terror, but ever and anon cast furtive glances of terror round the room at the least sound, casting up his eyes, and ejaculating, "O Lord! O Lord!" The old man felt much doubt and misgiving as each moment his companions avowed yet more plainly their intention to stop at nothing—no crime—to carry out their plans. He thought of his daughter Leah—so good, so pure—and of her exertions against Nathan Mira, and of her exhortation to him not to be led away by bad men; and, lastly, of her singular dream and presentiment of evil. But then he thought of his gold, his cherished gold, and remembered that if a son was born to the prince, his daughter's portion—that wealth which should endow her as her beauty and goodness deserved—would be irretrievably lost. This thought evenly balanced the scale against his previous misgivings, and he consoled himself by saying, "The Lord will not desert his servant. No son will be born to rob my Leah of her heritage."

He knew not that at that very time the dreaded event had happened, and that the Lady Margaret was now calmly sleeping, watched over by Leah.

Renard continued drinking till the flush of intoxication appeared in his face, and his eyes shone with unwonted brilliancy.

"Well, good Nesmer," he said, presently, "to business. What of the prince—what of the Lady Margaret—what of the departed child?"

The steward made no answer, but looked up towards Nathan.

"You asked several questions," said the latter. "As to the prince, he is old, very old. What more natural than that he should die? As to the Lady Margaret, she is ill, very ill. What more natural than that she should also die?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Abraham asked—

"What of the child, if one should be born?"

Nathan made no answer.

"On what are we to decide?" said Renard. "What do you advise, Nesmer?"

"My advice," he said, "is, that if the child be a girl we allow nature to take its course; the birth of a female child will not interfere with our prospects. The consummation may be delayed weeks, or perhaps months, but nevertheless the end will surely come. Prince Gunther is old and feeble. His wife is young, it is true, but in ill health, and worn away by sorrow. They will die—good!—that is what we require."

"But if it is a male child?" asked Renard.

Nesmer did not reply to this question in words, but looked round on his companions' faces significantly.

Janos dashed his hand heavily on the table, and in turn asked—

"What if it be a son that is born?"

Nesmer hesitated a moment, and then asked—

"We are associates, are we not?"

All nodded in token of assent.

"We are not children, and are associated together for one purpose."

"Assuredly not," said Renard. "We have a pur-

Van Pratt made no reply.

Gunther staggered about as if drunk ; then all at once his limbs failed him, and he fell to the floor writhing in the agonies of death. A fearful cry burst from him ; again and again he groaned, and prayed piteously for help. At last the writhings grew more feeble, the cries more faint, then ceased altogether—and there was silence in the chamber of death !

Nathan and Van Pratt, who had been watching the hideous scene with outward calmness, whatever their thoughts might have been, knew that it was over. Gunther, Prince of Monte Corro, lay at the foot of the couch with upturned face and staring eyes—a hideous, ghastly corpse !

The Lady Margaret, his wife—the young, the beautiful—lay also—calm, motionless—dead ! Leah, the Jewish maiden, was also insensible ; one beautiful arm thrown caressingly over the cold dead form, her dark hair resting on the dead face of her she loved and served so faithfully in life.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE JEWISH MAIDEN RECOVERS FROM HER SWOON AND
SEES AN APPARITION.

"So far, so good," said Nathan; "now for the finish."

"What is next?" asked the other—"the child?"

He turned towards the oratory, behind the curtains of which were the infant and cradle.

"The child, yes; and yon girl," was the reply, as the speaker fixed his basilisk glance on the still insensible Leah.

"Is it, then, necessary?"

"Yes. She heard, saw, and understood all, though in the darkness she did not recognise you and me; she has seen me before but once, and then I was in the shadow. We have no choice. We cannot allow her to spoil all; as, though she may not know us, she knows enough to spoil all our work. She saw and comprehended that I was forcing *her* to drink against her will. Come, let us make the girl safe."

Then he advanced to the bed, and, raising the still insensible form of Leah, he carried her into a recess; and calling to his companion for some cord, bound her securely, and then proceeded to gag her, insensible as she was.

"What necessity for all this?" asked Van Pratt;

"surely you can find some excuse for the young maid as well as the old man. It will be thought that she died from fright. What more natural? The old prince dead from old age and weakness, his wife from pain and the perils of childbirth, and this young girl from fear. As for the child, it died immediately after birth. You understand?" he added significantly, making a sign with his head towards the oratory where the cradle was.

"Yes, I understand," said Mira; "and I also understand that this business must be done in my way. Should the old Jew find his daughter dead he would make a terrible outcry, and in his rage and grief would accuse us all. This would awaken suspicion; and besides, the old man would be unmanageable, and our projects would fail through his obstinacy."

Leah now gave signs of returning animation. A faint colour again tinged her cheek; and her bosom, from which the rough usage of Mira, in dragging her from the bed, had partly torn her bodice, began to heave as she gaspingly drew breath. The window of the recess in which they were looked out on to the courtyard; on the other side was the door of the supper-room, where were Nesmer, Abraham, Renard, and Janos.

Mira, looking out, saw the door of the room open, and Janos struggling to force his way out. Renard and Nesmer were endeavouring to prevent him, pacifying him all in their power. The Hungarian had his sword drawn, and was struggling with drunken fury. It seemed, from the words Nathan could gather, that he was coming to search for him and Van Pratt, *whom he had missed when he awoke.*

"Come," said Nathan to the other, "hasten—bind up her mouth, secure her well to one of the window-bars, and let us go to those fellows. If that devil Janos come here blustering and swearing, he will spoil all. Suspicion will be aroused at the discovery of the two dead bodies. Leah will tell her story; her father will believe her, of course. He will be frantic with rage. We shall lose all we have been striving for; and moreover," here he lowered his voice, "perhaps the law may take a criminal view of the affair. You understand, my friend; so come with me."

* * * * *

Leah Geld lay in the recess, bound and gagged: slowly she recovered consciousness, and awoke to all the horrors of the scene. From where she lay she could see into the dimly-lighted room, although she was powerless to move hand or foot. At first she could not remember under what circumstances she was placed in her present position; but gradually what had happened unfolded itself to her, and she remembered everything—the piercing cries and entreaties of the poor lady, the cruel determination of Mira in forcing down her throat what she felt convinced was poison—the death of Lady Margaret, and her own swooning—all this she remembered. She cast her eyes wildly round the room, and they fell on the prostrate form of Prince Gunther. She knew at once that he was dead. The clenched hands, the firmly-set teeth, the livid lips, and the ghastly dull glare of the protruded eyes, were sufficient evidence of the fact. She tried to cry out, but was utterly unable so to do, nor could she move a hair's-breadth. Tears came into

her beautiful eyes as she thought of her helpless position and the cruel outrage put upon her.

As she was thus thinking, and hoping, almost against hope, that either Theodore or some of the soldiers would discover her position before Mira returned, she heard the sound of footsteps approaching. She trembled with apprehension, for she did not doubt it was her enemies returning to complete their work—perhaps to murder her. In an agony of apprehension she listened ; she heard the opening of the door.

Leah listened in increasing alarm. Who could be in the oratory, from which there was no egress ?

Suddenly the curtains were drawn on one side, and she saw a cloaked figure advance into the room. He proceeded, and, passing close to her, stood by the side of the bed ; then he looked round him, and appeared to comprehend all. He laid his hand on the cold brow of poor Margaret.

“Dead!—dead!” he muttered ; “too late—too late!”

With these words he turned, again entered the oratory, and appeared to be conversing in a low tone.

Leah heard an exclamation of grief or anger, and the curtains were again drawn roughly on one side. Then the same figure advanced, but he was followed by two others, who also wore long cloaks.

Leah now noticed what had at first escaped her in the dimly lighted chamber—the cloaks of all three were of a bright scarlet colour. Large hats with black plumes almost concealed their faces, and there hung by the side of each a long, straight sword. They wore *long jack-boots*, which reached above the knee. Each

of them wore spurs, and their splashed and stained attire seemed to indicate a long and rapid journey on horseback.

"Too late—too late!" muttered the others, as they gazed sorrowfully on the ghastly scene.

"Yes," replied he who had first entered; "too late to save, but not too late to avenge!"

As he spoke these words in a low deep voice, he removed his hat. The others followed his example, and they all three fell on their knees by the bedside. They bent their heads forward on the bed, and appeared to be reciting something together in low solemn tones.

Leah was nearly fainting with terror. She recognised in the cloaked man who had first entered the same she had seen fight with and kill the cavalier nine months previously.

She recognised the scarlet cloak, the hat with the plumes, and the long sword and big boots.

She imagined them supernatural beings—else how could they have entered where there was no entrance?

She saw in them evil spirits, who had been raised by the incantations of the old prince who now lay dead, or by the villain Mira, to assist in carrying out his plans.

She saw in their presence nothing but more terrors—more danger to herself.

The three figures rose from their knees. They passed into the oratory, and did not draw the curtains behind them, so that Leah could observe all their actions. There were many wax candles before the

shrine of the Virgin, which the good Margaret used to keep constantly burning.

Now, however, they were extinguished—Margaret's pious hands could never again kindle them. One of the figures produced a light, and proceeded to ignite all the candles.

As they flamed up one by one, Leah could distinctly observe their features. They were handsome, and perfectly regular. Each had a lofty brow, on either side of which fell a profusion of dark curly hair. Their eyes were fine and piercing, and their mouths were of almost womanly beauty. The contour of their faces was a perfect oval, and it would have been impossible for the most fastidious to find a fault with any one feature.

They now turned towards her; and one of them pointing to the cradle with the sleeping child, the others raised it, and removed it farther back into the recess.

Their faces were turned fully towards her, and the light of twenty candles gave her the opportunity of observing them closely. She thought she had never seen or dreamed of such beauty in man. They seemed to her, as they stood together apparently consulting, to be evil spirits who had been permitted by the Omnipotent to assume the shape of angels. There was a grandeur and loftiness about their tall forms and noble air, which, in spite of herself, prepossessed Leah in their favour.

"My God! my God!" she thought, "how is it possible that fiends should be so beautiful—that evil *spirits* should appear so like angels?"

Again she saw them kneel, and, bowing their heads before the Virgin's shrine, heard them recite some words in a low tone. They seemed to be praying.

This astonished Leah more than ever. If they were evil, how could they dare even to enter so holy a place? And praying, too! Surely this was not usual with either evil spirits or evil men?

But then she remembered the old traditions of Monte Corro concerning the three demons—how they always appeared at a birth or a death. Here were two deaths and a birth.

The young girl, although greatly alarmed, and unable even to cry out, retained her presence of mind. She determined to wait patiently, putting her whole trust in God.

The three figures rose from their knees. Then she saw one—the same who had first entered the chamber—take a small silver crucifix from the shrine, and hold it above his head; his lips moved, and his eyes were fixed on the emblem of the Christian faith; he appeared to be registering a solemn vow. He then handed it to the second, who did exactly the same; then the third took it, and did the same also.

The first figure then entered into the chamber, and advanced straight to the recess, as if for the purpose of looking from the barred window. Leah was in an agony of terror; in spite of her resolution, she felt that she must faint. The figure advanced till his cloak absolutely brushed her. Suddenly he started—he had seen her. The recess was so deep and dark, that it was impossible to distinguish more than the vague outline of any object. He went quickly to the

oratory, and returned bearing one of the candles which burned before the shrine.

Holding this above his head, he gazed in apparent astonishment at Leah. She was bound hand and foot to one of the iron bars, and her face was partially concealed by the handkerchief which the ruffian Mira had used to gag her. But her great beauty was at once apparent. The violence the two villains had used in securing her had disarranged her dress; her beautiful neck was bare, and her bosom, which heaved and fell wildly from excitement and terror, was partially exposed to his gaze.

He looked for some time in amazement and admiration. There was nothing fierce or angry in his glance, it seemed to be one more of astonishment than anything else.

Then, setting down the candlestick, he advanced, and laid his hand upon her with the intention of releasing her from her cruel bonds; but Leah, in spite of all her fortitude, was now in such an agony of terror at the approach of what she supposed a spirit, that she swooned.

Her fears, however, were groundless, for the supposed evil spirit proceeded, with the utmost tenderness, to remove the gag from her mouth; he unloosed the cords which bound her beautiful limbs, and raising her insensible form in his arms, he bore her into the oratory, depositing her carefully on a couch at the foot of the steps of the shrine. His companions looked astonished.

"What!" said one of them, in a low tone, looking at *the lifeless* body of Leah; "more murder?—more

death? Who and what is this? Where did you discover her, Rudolph?"

"She is not dead, Ernest," was the reply, "but has swooned from fear. I found her bound and gagged in the recess, when I went to look from the window. She was sensible then, but when I approached to release her she fainted; probably she anticipated more of the ill-usage she had already experienced at the hands of the ruffians who murdered our father, and have murdered our sister and her husband."

"Who can she be?" said the one who has been called Ernest.

"I know not," replied Rudolph, sadly; "possibly one of our sister's ladies. No matter; it is enough that she has been cruelly ill-used, and is unfortunate, like ourselves. We must protect her and remove her from this place till we have exterminated the murdering gang, and can resume our rights. Poor girl!" he continued, looking sadly on her insensible form; "so young, so beautiful, and yet to have enemies who could thus ill-treat her."

He approached her, and tenderly readjusted the drapery over her bosom, which had been torn aside in the struggle with Mira.

"Fear not, lady," he said, addressing the still insensible girl. "You shall find in Rudolph of Monte Corro a friend with a strong arm, a loyal heart, and a sharp sword to defend you from further outrage."

Turning to the others, he added—"We must remove her from this place, and take her under our protection. Is it not so, my brothers?"

They mused for a moment; then Ernest replied—

"Yes; it would be alike dastardly and cruel to leave any unfortunate in the hands of any of these accursed villains, much more one so young and beautiful as this lady. God knows we have work enough on our hands already; but the Ruler of all things will surely not look down upon us with anger for saving this poor girl from her enemies. What say you, Albert?" he added, turning to the one who had not yet spoken.

"It must be as you say," was the reply; "it would not be the act of a gallant gentleman thus to desert one so helpless and innocent. But what is to be done with her? What haven of safety can we offer—we who are ourselves hunted like wild beasts, and can scarcely remain two days together in one place without jeopardizing our lives?"

Rudolph thought for a moment, and said—"We must take her to Karl the woodman's hut in the forest; there we must leave her till we can provide some safer asylum."

"And the child," asked Ernest; "our sister's child?"

"We must remove him also to a place of safety. Where is Claude the chasseur? We can depend upon him."

"He has not yet returned, but he is to await our coming at the mouth of the Hell."

"Good! then he must be despatched to Heidelberg and Frankfort for some of the best and bravest of our associates; thirty, at the least, will be necessary to take this girl and the child to the frontier; for Germany is no longer safe for any of us; at least, until that *unsuccessful insurrection* at Munich is forgotten. The

grand duke has offered a reward for our capture, dead or alive, and our chance of justice in Germany is hopeless. But the day will come," he said, vehemently, stamping his booted heel on the ground, "when this accursed band of murderers, ruffians, cut-throats, thieves, shall be confronted with us, when flight shall be no longer necessary for us nor available for them—*then let them tremble!*"

As he spoke, he grasped the hilt of his sword, his lips were compressed, and his face was pale with suppressed passion.

His youthful appearance and the feminine beauty of his face seemed strangely at variance with the fierce fire of his large dark eyes and the stern determination in his look and demeanour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PLANS OF THE CONSPIRATORS.

RETURN we now to Mira, Van Pratt, and the other four conspirators.

As the crafty physician and the Dutchman passed along the corridor to rejoin their companions, the latter said—

“What are you going to do with the girl? It seems to me needless folly to burden ourselves with her; if we kill her, it will arouse more suspicion than if we allow her to tell her improbable tale. You can say she is deranged; administer a drug or so, which will induce temporary delirium, and every one will believe that it is as you say. No one will credit her wild tale.”

“Van Pratt,” said Mira, sternly fixing his eyes on him; “you want the gold, do you not—your share of this business?”

“Assuredly,” grunted the Dutchman.

“You would have it at once, without difficulty, trouble, or delay?”

Van Pratt nodded assent.

“Then,” said Mira, seizing his arm, and halting, “do not interfere with me or my schemes. I want *the girl*, and will have her; let that suffice. She has

scorned, insulted, and thwarted me. She shall pay for it in another way. I mean to make her my mistress. It shall be so—willing or unwilling; Leah Geld, she shall be brought on her knees to Nathan Mira,—on her knees, beseeching that I should spare her—on her knees, praying that I should rather deprive her of life than honour. Ha! ha! I think I see her now, in her glorious beauty—her hair dishevelled, her bosom heaving and panting with grief and fear. She shall be mine—mine, Van Pratt; so say no more.”

His eyes shone with passion at the picture he had drawn; his cheek flushed, and he looked altogether what he was—a ruthless, determined villain.

Van Pratt smilingly shrugged his shoulders, and said—

“As you please, my friend—as you please; it is your business. If you are fool enough to be caught by the girl’s handsome face, and run the risk of spoiling all, and putting your neck in a halter for her, you may do so for me. Only do not let your love affairs interfere with the success of our great undertaking. I fancy if our friend Janos thought that your folly was likely to deprive him of the share he expects, he would not be well pleased.”

“As you say,” replied Mira, with a black look, “it is my business; so please don’t interfere.”

The Dutchman made no answer; at this moment they entered the room where the other conspirators were sitting.

Janos had recovered from the effect of the wine, and was again applying himself to the bottle.

The others could hardly restrain his impatience.

He started up every five minutes, and declared his intention of seeking Mira and Van Pratt. He was furious at the delay, and insisted on knowing what was to be done.

Abraham Geld, the money-lender, was in mortal terror at his violence, and had taken a seat at the greatest distance the table allowed. Renard and Nesmer, although they said little, looked gloomy and discontented at the prolonged absence of the other two.

When Mira and the Dutchman rejoined them, it may be imagined that they were immediately assailed with questions and demands as to what had happened and what was to be done.

Mira took his seat deliberately at the head of the table, and, filling his glass, drank it off deliberately, without the slightest haste. There was nothing in his manner that could betray the least uneasiness. Renard drew closer to him, and awaited anxiously his words. Abraham Geld, from the lower end of the table, peered anxiously out from his small, greedy, sunken eyes. Nesmer, the steward, was the only one present, with the exception of Mira, who seemed at all at ease. As for Janos, he rose, and, drinking off another goblet of wine at a draught, dashed his clenched fist heavily on the table, and shouted, "By my father's grave, but I will know the meaning of this! What is doing? what is done? and what is to be done? Speak, some of you!" he cried, glancing round the table at each by turns.

There was a pause of a few moments. None but Mira and Van Pratt could answer, and they seemed *to be in no hurry*. At last Nathan said, slowly and

deliberately, "Captain Janos, and gentlemen all, if you will be seated and listen, I will endeavour to explain the state of affairs."

All took their seats, and awaited anxiously. Janos followed their example with a bad grace.

"I think we all understood before that there was one event which, if it happened, would upset all our schemes, and render all our previous labours futile—which would cause us to lose, not only all hope for the future, but also the money which has been so lavishly spent already, and which our worthy friend Abraham so considerably furnished."

The Jew looked aghast at the bare thought of losing, not only the prospective gains, but also the sums which he had already grudgingly supplied.

"Well, gentlemen," continued Mira, slowly, "that event that should be so prejudicial to our interests, so serious to our hopes, is, as you know, the birth of a male heir. That is understood. The next obstacle in our way is Prince Gunther: he is old, and will not live long; so we may dismiss that from our minds."

As he said these words, he smiled strangely; he did not care to say that old Gunther had been already removed by his diabolical skill.

"The next impediment, gentlemen, the next obstacle to be removed is the Lady Margaret. We cannot enjoy the revenues of Monte Corro, according to the terms of our agreement, so long as she lives. Well, gentlemen, I pledge you my word, you may also dismiss that from your minds. The Lady Margaret is ill, very ill; she will not, I fear, long survive, in spite of all my skill. There are other trifling affairs, which

I may as well mention at once. One of Lady Margaret's ladies-in-waiting has overheard some of our secrets ; she has seen what she should not have seen, and she knows quite enough, if let alone, to spoil all. By your leave, then, gentlemen, I will see to this ; I will take charge of the girl. Are you all agreed ?”

They all signified their assent ; even Janos did not care to dispute the point.

“ Now, gentlemen, it is my painful duty to inform you of an event which has occurred, whose effects it will demand all our energies to counteract.”

He paused. Every one waited in breathless anxiety. Mira continued, still in the same deliberate, calm voice—

“ Our worst fears have been realized : an heir is born to the estates of Monte Corro.”

Nothing could exceed the consternation which these words produced. Janos behaved like a mad-man ; he rose, and paced furiously up and down the room. Abraham Geld, the Jew, grew livid as he heard the news which seemed so ruinous to his avaricious hopes.

“ O Lord ! O Lord !” he cried, “ I am a ruined, wretched old man, an outcast on the earth. My child, my child, your old father has ruined you !”

He wrung his hands, and absolutely wept with grief.

“ Solomon Nesmer,” he cried, “ it is you who have brought this great loss on me ; you have deceived and robbed me ; I know it. I am an old fool, and you think to deprive me of my hard-earned gains. But *you shall not do it ; you shall not.* I will have my

gold! Give me my gold!" he cried. Rushing frantically at the steward, and seizing him by the throat—"My gold! my gold! the gold you have robbed me and my child of!"

He seemed frantic with grief at his supposed loss. He grasped Nesmer's throat with a strength which one would hardly have supposed it possible his attenuated form could possess.

"Give it me, or I will strangle you; give it me back, robber!" he cried, not relaxing his hold.

Nesmer vainly endeavoured to free himself.

Van Pratt and Renard approached to remove the infuriated Jew; but Janos, who was himself in a towering rage, was before them. He made a few hasty steps, and seized Abraham by the collar; then exerting his immense strength, he tore him away as he would a child, and threw him violently from him.

Away spun the Jew some dozen yards, till he was brought up by being dashed against the wainscoting.

Janos glared furiously around him. His blood was up, the tiger-nature aroused. He only wanted an excuse to draw his ponderous sabre, and attack every one indiscriminately who appeared to oppose him. But none cared to brave his fury. Abraham lay against the wainscoting, rubbing his limbs and bewailing his supposed loss.

Janos did not deign him a glance, but said to Nesmer in a loud, threatening voice—

"Now, Mr. Steward, please to let me know about this business. What is done, and what is to be done? Is this a plot to deprive me of my share in the profit? By my father's grave! if you attempt it with me, I

will not take you by the throat, like that old dotard, but I will cut you down with my good sabre as you stand—you or any other that dares attempt to play me false. So answer me now at your peril, one of you! I know nothing of your books or your compacts. I do know that I have been deceived by you in more than one affair; and I know that while I have braved all the danger, I have had but little of the profit. And I know, and I swear by my father's grave, that if I am this time, from any cause, deprived of my share in the Monte Corro estates, I will cut you all to ribbons. It is useless your telling me the money is not to be had, or that something has gone wrong; it will not satisfy me."

He seated himself at the table, and placed his terrible sabre before him.

Even Mira, with all his assumed indifference, felt that the Hungarian was not to be trifled with. As for Renard, he could boast, and at times when he knew he had the best of it, would fight, but as to attempting to cope with the herculean Janos, he would as soon have thought of attacking a troop of cavalry single-handed. Abraham Geld had picked himself up from the floor, and again ventured to approach the table, taking care, however, not to put himself within reach of the Hungarian. Renard and Nesmer, who did not know all, fully expected a storm; they saw that Janos was half drunk, and they knew that, if provoked ever so little, he would assuredly keep his word, and lay about him indiscriminately with that enormous sabre of his. *They* were silent, and cast furtive glances to

the door, fully intending to beat a retreat if necessary.

"Once again, I say," shouted Janos, dashing his hand on the table with such violence as to shiver some of the glasses, "what do you propose doing? Answer me, some one; d——!" he said, starting to his feet, and grasping his sabre, "is no one going to reply?"

He appeared mad with passion.

All knew that to trifle with him further would be to goad the tiger to utter fury. His eyes glared, and the muscles in his splendid limbs seemed to swell, as if fresh blood were being poured into their veins for the combat.

Then Mira, who seemed to have been revolving a plan of action in his mind, spoke.

"If you will be quiet for a few minutes, my good friend," he said, with a great effort of self-command, "I will both tell you what has been done and what is to be done. How many men among the retainers, the domestics, and the guard can you rely on?" said he to Nesmer.

The steward thought for a moment, and replied—

"There are two hundred men in the guard; among them are seventy ancient vassals of Monte Corro—men whose great-grandsires have fought and died for the princes of that family. Then there are about twenty-five of Count Ulric's men, who came here after their master's death; there are about forty more who would side with them, and take part against us, especially as they are commanded by Theodore Vanderpant, who is our mortal enemy. The others are with us, heart and soul. I have bought them all over to

us ; they have been liberally bribed, and have been promised more."

Renard looked dismayed at this, and even Mira appeared troubled.

"One hundred and thirty-five to sixty-five," said the latter. "In case of necessity, the odds are great."

"Stay a moment," said the steward ; "I had thought of that. Of the one hundred and thirty-five, twenty are at Castle Roche with the captain of the guard, who has gone for a month's hunting, leaving here the lieutenant and a boy in command. Then there are twenty who have been allowed to leave for a week's furlough, and are probably scattered about among the villages. Also there are at least twenty who are so utterly drunk as to be helpless. That reduces them to seventy-five. As to the domestics, the majority are, of course, against us ; but they are unarmed, and the greater part of them helplessly drunk. I have taken care they should have plenty of the strongest wine in the cellar ; and if it had not been for the lieutenant, who is as watchful as a lynx, more of the soldiers would be in the same state. As it is, we can depend upon sixty-five men ; our enemies number seventy-five ; we are prepared, they are not ; so I think in that respect we are equal to them ; and as to domestics and old retainers, the brave Janos here is worth a hundred of them. So if, in case of need, we should be driven to extremities, we have a decided advantage."

Janos smiled grimly as the steward finished. He appeared gratified by the statement, and the hope of a fray ; for unscrupulous ruffian as he was, and desirous of *wealth*, no matter how attained, we must do him

the justice to say that he would as soon fight half-a-dozen as one, when once his blood was up.

Mira leaned his head on his hands, and thought for a moment. "We must avoid a fray, if possible," he said. "You rely, Nesmer, on our enemies being unprepared. I think it possible you may be mistaken. I saw the lieutenant this morning personally inspecting the arms of all the men. I noticed also that he has stationed his own men—those upon whom he can thoroughly rely—in all the commanding positions. He himself has taken charge of the drawbridge; so, in the event of our requiring to leave for a time (which I think probable), we might have difficulty. However, these are the facts: it behoves us to make the best of them. Now, gentlemen, I will proceed to satisfy you all, and the brave Janos in particular, as to what has been done, and what is to be done. I informed you that an heir had been born. That heir is alive, and likely to live; for I never saw a more healthy child. One of the domestics knows of its birth; that is no matter, if the business is carried out as I propose. I have one more piece of news, which will perhaps surprise you." And Mira smiled a sickly, sneering, triumphant smile. "You are aware that Prince Gunther and his wife, while living, would keep us from our inheritance. The gallant Janos was loud in denouncing foul play against an old man and a sick woman. Well, it is unnecessary. Gunther was old, and his wife was ill and worn out with grief; and now nature has stepped in to aid us, for they are both dead." Again the crafty Nathan smiled the same deadly smile.

All were taken by surprise at this announcement.

It was what all hoped for, but none expected that their wishes would have been so soon gratified.

Each man knew full well that they both had been foully murdered, but none cared to say so; they rejoiced at the fact, and did not inquire as to the means which had accomplished it.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mira, with the same deadly smile, "there remains but this infant. I think you will all allow that Providence has so far blessed me with its favour in this affair. The death of the prince and his wife, for instance, must have been a special interposition—it was so very fortunate, was it not?"

Still his features wore that crafty smile. Even Renard, who was perhaps the most thoroughly unscrupulous and utterly unprincipled ruffian of the six, excepting Mira, shuddered; he was superstitious, and trembled at the horrid blasphemy, for he had not the slightest doubt in his mind that the unfortunate prince and Margaret had been foully and treacherously murdered. He well knew—for he was almost as crafty and far-seeing as Mira himself—that the latter left the room for that very purpose when Janos was swearing so loudly that it should not be done. Few things escaped Renard, and he had seen the glance with which Mira beckoned Van Pratt. He saw it, and knew at once that something desperate was to be done.

All were silent. Though they knew and expected that violent measures would be used if necessary, they were somewhat confounded at the suddenness of the news—two deaths, and within an hour, for Mira had ~~not~~ *not been gone longer.* It was enough to appal the

most hardened heart to hear the cool, sneering, triumphant tone in which Mira announced the death—the murder, as they well knew—of his benefactor and his wife.

“Now, gentlemen,” continued Mira, “as the past is so far satisfactory, we will proceed to talk about the future. Our work is not yet finished. I have arranged that the guard should be removed from the corridor. How many men—friends, good men and true—are at our disposal at once, Nesmer?” he asked.

“The whole are at our command in half an hour.”

“Good. It will be necessary for us to take immediate possession of the castle and estates under the bond which Prince Gunther executed with Abraham Geld—that is to say, if anything should happen to the child. Life is very uncertain. Science is powerful, but it cannot ward off death; there is no knowing what may happen—the child might not live; such things frequently occur, and in case of anything of the kind, it would be necessary for our friend Abraham to take formal possession under the bond, until the necessary certificates of the deaths and their causes are handed in by me, the physician who attended them, and until the bond is duly proved and acknowledged by the grand duke. It is possible that some of the old retainers and adherents of this upstart lieutenant might be inclined to dispute us our legal right. In that case, our course is plain; we must obtain possession first, and argue about it afterwards. For these reasons we must have a sufficient force at our command to assert our rights.”

“But,” said Abraham Geld, in a faltering voice,

He led the way from the room, carrying a lighted lamp in his hand.

But still he could not shake off that indefinable feeling of dread.

They passed rapidly along the various passages into the great corridor.

Followed by the others, he advanced to the door of the chamber in which he had left Gunther and Margaret, whom he had murdered, the helpless child whom he intended to murder, and Leah, whom he had so cruelly outraged, and for whom he destined so infamous a fate.

He produced the key from his pocket, and proceeded to unlock the outer door.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF LEAH AND THE
LADY MARGARET'S CHILD.

LEAH now gave signs of recovery. She drew a long breath, and a slight shiver passed over her frame. The delicate colour was beginning to return to her fair cheek, and her eyelids quivered as if she was about to open them.

The three brothers still stood together, talking in a low voice.

"To Karl, the woodman's, be it, then. Come, my brothers, it is time we left," said Rudolph.

Rudolph then spread his cloak around the form of Leah, who was just awaking to consciousness of her position.

Albert proceeded to do the same with the infant, who was still peacefully slumbering.

Rudolph raised Leah in his arms carefully and tenderly. The young girl shuddered, and struggled slightly to free herself. She thought she was still in the hands of enemies. She muttered some inarticulate words, which seemed to be of entreaty, and for a moment opened her eyes.

She was still too weak and confused to either resist or ask an explanation. She knew that she was in the

hands of a man who carried her tenderly, without roughness—that was all. The faintness again came over her, and she lay back, reclining her head on his shoulder, and again gave way to insensibility.

Rudolph was advancing across towards a small niche in the oratory with his beautiful burden, when they heard the key turned in the chamber-door. Then the inner door was opened, and they heard the sound of loud voices; they heard the tramp of men's feet, who hurried across the room.

Then a voice said, "See, there are the bodies of Gunther and Margaret. You see I have not deceived you. There now remains but one, the child! This way."

They heard the sounds of the footsteps approaching the oratory. Albert laid down the child, and Rudolph did the same with Leah.

They each threw open their cloaks, so as to allow their arms full play, and drew their long straight swords.

They then placed themselves immediately behind the curtain, and waited, with a fierce determination, their discovery by their enemies. They grasped their swords convulsively; their eyes shone with a fierce light; lips were compressed, and their faces as pale as marble; but it was the pallor of a relentless, dauntless determination, of suppressed passion, not that of fear.

"This way," they heard Mira say, "the child is here."

They heard the footsteps advance right up to the oratory, and the curtain was drawn suddenly on one *side*. The sight that met the eyes of the six con-

spirators was one which drove the blood back to their hearts, and struck, almost paralysed them, with fear.

In one rapid glance Mira took in all. He saw, with astounding horror, the tall forms of the three brothers as they stood together. Their long, bright swords glistened in the light of the numerous candles. Their eyes were fixed on Mira and his associates, with a stern, dauntless expression which made them quail.

Mira and Van Pratt, who were foremost, started back with a cry of terror.

"The three bastards of Monte Corro!" they cried, flying precipitately towards the door of the chamber.

At these words, Janos, who had kept moodily in the background, started forward. Like the vulture scenting its prey, he dashed across the room, shouting, as he drew his sabre—"Ha! ha!—the Demons! Stand back and let me come near them. Now you shall see what Janos, the Magyar, can do!"

He saw the three men with drawn swords, calmly awaiting his attack.

Janos was brave as a lion; but three to one were great odds, and he knew he could count on but little assistance from his cowardly companions. He paused a moment before attacking them.

Rudolph smiled scornfully as he saw his hesitation, and dashing his hat on the ground, and throwing his scarlet cloak well back, he advanced into the room to meet the terrible Janos single-handed.

Rudolph stood with his profile towards the oratory, from which the light of twenty candles beamed full on

his pale, determined, handsome face. His lofty brow, and the fierce glitter of his dark eyes, gave him a grand, majestic appearance.

Janos prepared to precipitate himself upon him. As his eyes fell full upon the face and form of Rudolph, his features assumed a horrified expression—his limbs shook under him. He staggered back, and dropping his sabre, said—

"Count Ulric, by the living God!"

Then he fled from the room in the utmost terror. He thought he beheld in Rudolph the apparition of the murdered Ulric of Monte Corro.

Rudolph then retired behind the curtain, and again drew it. Then might have been heard the click of a spring—the creaking of wood—a rustling of garments—a few hurried footsteps, and all was still.

The next moment Nesmer and Mira burst into the room, accompanied by about thirty of the guard, on whom they could depend for any villany.

"Seize them!" cried Mira, to the soldiers, "they cannot escape—there is no exit to the oratory—they cannot escape!"

They advanced cautiously, with their muskets lowered, towards the curtain; then one of them pushed back the curtain with the muzzle of his piece, and looked in.

The oratory still blazed with the light of the candles, and they could see every corner, but they could not discover that there was any one there.

"Advance!" cried Mira; "they must be concealed behind the tapestry around the altar."

They advanced into the small room, completely filling it with their numbers, but it was empty.

Mira himself now pushed in, and looked carefully around. To his astonishment and horror there was no one there. The three men, the young girl, and even the child, were all gone.

Nesmer, Van Pratt, and Renard, who joined him in his search, gazed in each other's faces in silent horror.

"My God!" cried Renard, with pale face and trembling voice, "but what is the meaning of this? This is awful! There is a power greater than ours at work here!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE PHANTOM RIDERS.

THE soldiers sounded carefully with the butt end of their muskets every foot of the panelling, but could not discover even a rat-hole.

The conspirators were now in a state of blank consternation. The most of them believed that the sudden disappearance of four persons and a child must have been effected by supernatural means. Although they had often laughed at the old traditions of Monte Corro—which ascribed to the family an intimate connexion with beings of another world—still they had all felt at times a superstitious fear when some of the old retainers related the legends of the castle; and then there was the piercing shriek which, nine months before, aroused the sleeping inmates; also the disappearance of the cavalier, which had never yet been accounted for; all these things combined to inspire them with a dread which they endeavoured in vain to shake off.

Nesmer looked at Renard, and Renard looked at Nesmer, but neither could find any consolation in the other.

Having thoroughly convinced themselves that their *prey had escaped* them, the soldiers were allowed to

leave ; and the associates gathered together to consult on a plan of action.

"What is to be done?" said Renard ; "the child is gone."

"O Lord ! O Lord !" said Abraham, in a weak and trembling voice. "I shall be ruined. The child ; they have taken the child ; but I have the compact—yes, it is signed and attested. I will take possession of the estates—Monte Corro is mine—mine. I have paid my hard-earned gold—the estates are mine. Is it not so, good Nesmer?"

Nesmer considered a moment, and said—

"We must give out that the child has been murdered, and the body carried away by bandits ; then we must take possession of the castle and estates in the name of Abraham Geld, who must produce the compact. Then we will immediately proceed to divide the ready money, and arrange for the annual distribution of the revenues among us."

"As for the child," he continued, "it has been carried off, but by men—aye, men," he said, emphatically, as he observed the others look to him for an explanation—"men, strong and determined men, who will leave no stone unturned to baffle us, who would, had they arrived sooner, have frustrated all our plans—in short, the child and the girl have been removed by the three bastards of Monte Corro."

"Ah !" cried Janos, "would that I had known they had been men, and not spirits, how soon would I have cut my way through them ! but I thought I saw in the one who advanced to meet me the spirit of the man I slew. It was just so that he stood—his brow

his hand a drawn sword. I saw, them but for one moment, but that moment I shall never forget. Their eyes glared with an unearthly light, and they rode at a pace beyond the power of mortal steeds. I hastened on, doubting not that I had seen the three demons, who always appear at a birth or a death in the family of Monte Corro."

A dead silence prevailed for a moment or two; most believed the man's tale. Mira, Nesmer, and Van Pratt exchanged glances. Nesmer was about to commence again, when a man on horseback rode into the yard. He heard on all sides the low mutterings with which all discussed the man's tale.

"The Three Demons' phantom steeds"—"Hell of Monte Corro!"—"disappeared in fire and smoke, carrying with them a woman and a child!"—"Prince Gunther's familiar spirits come for his soul!"

Hearing these confused and disjointed mutterings, the man inquired the meaning of them. He was informed at once by twenty eager voices.

"By my soul!" he exclaimed, "but I have also seen these three horsemen you speak of."

"Where?—where?" exclaimed several. But Mira had heard the man's words, and stopping Nesmer, who was again about proceeding with his address, beckoned the man to him.

"What is it, my man, you say about three horsemen you saw?"

"I left Obernburg this evening, and wishing to get in before the drawbridge was drawn up, I took a near cut across the country. I missed my way, and after *wandering* about for some time I found myself at

Karl's, the woodman's hut. I dismounted to inquire my way, and get a drink of wine as my flask was empty. As I was riding away again I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, and I saw three mounted figures appear in the gloom. I instantly hid behind some bushes till they had passed me. To my astonishment, instead of riding straight on, they turned from the bridle path and rode straight to the hut I had just left. Then one of them knocked at the door with the hilt of his sword; it was opened by Karl, who brought a light, and appeared to treat them with profound respect. Then I saw, as they dismounted, that one of them carried a lady, who was either asleep or insensible; another of them carried a child. They entered, and the door closed behind them. I waited for some time, but as no one came out again, and it was very cold, I rode on, and here I am."

Mira, who had listened intently to the man's narration, whispered to Nesmer—"It is the girl and the child who have been carried off from us that he has seen taken into the hut; we must follow at all hazards; conclude your speech, then let us start in pursuit with as many men as you can depend on."

Nesmer made an affirmative sign, and continued his address, speaking hastily—"Prince Gunther, our master, some twelvemonths before his death, executed a contract with my worthy friend, Abraham Geld, of Frankfort. The terms of that contract were as follow: In consideration of a large sum of money, and an annuity of one hundred thousand florins a year, Prince Gunther agreed, that after the death of himself and wife the whole principality and estates of

Monte Corro, together with all their revenues and the castle, should devolve to the said Abraham Geld. The deed was legally drawn up and duly executed. This is the deed," he cried, holding up to the gaze of every one a large scroll of parchment; "and in accordance with its provisions, I, the steward of Monte Corro, declare that Abraham Geld is the sole proprietor of the castle, and all the revenues of the domain. In proof of which I hand him the contract and the keys of the castle, also the key of the strong box, containing all the papers relating to the revenues, so long as they have been under my stewardship."

With these words he gave to the old Jew first the parchment and then the ponderous keys of the castle.

Loud murmurs arose from the assembled crowd; some cried, "But where is the child? By the law of the country no compact is binding if a child be afterwards born." Others shouted forth the names of Count Ulric's sons—the three demons of Monte Corro; others spoke of Margaret's sister, the Lady Helen, who was married to the Count Camille, the foul murder of whom, by Renard, was not yet known; all seemed discontented with the alleged compact, and gave vent to their discontent in loud and threatening murmurs; all, we said, but not quite all, for there was a considerable party, the hired soldiers, who had been suborned by Mira and Nesmer, and who expected a share of the plunder. These latter stood moodily by, leaning on their firelocks, and silently observing all that passed.

Mira heard the murmurs of discontent, which were *swelling* in loudness and significance, and observing

the small minority upon whom they could depend, saw that something must be done; accordingly he whispered to the steward, whom he seemed to prompt in everything—

“Nesmer, this will not do; we must pursue immediately the men who have carried off the girl and the child, were it only to distract the attention of the discontented, and give time for us to take quiet possession. Order thirty of your best and bravest men—men whom we can thoroughly depend on—to be in readiness. Then speak to the lieutenant; tell him that the child and Mademoiselle Geld have been carried away. Get him, with fifteen of his men, no more, to accompany us; then get him to despatch all the rest in another direction, under the charge of the sergeant; give an excuse that we are not sure that they have not taken the direction of Obensburg, in which case a larger force would be required than in merely attacking them at the woodman’s hut, and the robbers have numerous friends and associates in the town. Do this well and carefully, and he will certainly fall into the trap. Then you and the remainder of our men will stay, and have no difficulty in taking possession of the castle.”

Nesmer hastened to do as he was bid, and it was evident that Theodore Vanderpant fell at once into the trap; he had heard the recital of the horseman, and was only too eager to dash forward in pursuit, when he heard from Nesmer that it was Leah who had been carried away.

Nor did he object to send the larger part of his men in another direction, as Nesmer’s reasons were plausible, and seemed dictated by sound sense.

All was uproar and confusion.

Soon the two bodies of armed men were drawn up in readiness in the courtyard, and the thirty men upon whom the associates could count were all mounted, as also were the fifteen under the command of the young lieutenant; of those who were to accompany the sergeant in a different direction, about one-third had horses, the rest were on foot.

Then the tramp of the armed men, and the clattering of their horses' hoofs, might be heard, as they passed over the iron drawbridge.

The sergeant's party went first. Mira remained in close conversation with Nesmer and Abraham Geld while they were passing out, discussing their plan of operations. The original intention was to leave Janos, Renard, Abraham Geld, and Van Pratt behind with Nesmer, so that they should take possession while Mira rode on with the troopers. Mira saw, however, by the uneasy glances of the young lieutenant towards them, that this would only tend to excite his suspicions, and perhaps frustrate their objects altogether. Accordingly he spoke to the other associates, explaining to them the necessity of their accompanying him in the pursuit.

Van Pratt especially looked very black at this; he would have preferred to remain in possession of the castle, to riding some fifteen miles into the forest. "I am a man of peace," he cried. "I shall be of no assistance to you, I shall only be in the way; I will remain here with my friend Nesmer, and will go over the accounts of the estate during your absence."

The others, however, all saw the necessity of

averting suspicion as much as possible, and he was reluctantly induced to mount his horse in readiness to accompany them. Mira's caution proved well founded. Theodore approached Nesmer, and intimated to him his intention of leaving the trusty old sergeant, with a part of the guard, to take charge of the castle during his absence. His suspicions were evidently aroused at seeing Renard, Janos, Abraham Geld and Van Pratt in conversation with the steward, as if they intended to remain behind.

Nesmer made a sign to the others to get their horses and mount. They followed his directions; and as they did so, he said, carelessly, to the young lieutenant—

"As you please, sir; but I think it very probable you will require all your available force, without leaving your best and most trustworthy men in idleness here, while perhaps the young lady is even now in danger of her life, or worse outrage. I have already arranged for a sufficient guard to remain with me in the castle; even our friends here, Doctor Mira, Van Pratt, and Abraham Geld, are going to accompany you in the pursuit, so imminent do they believe the danger to be, and so desperate the resistance which the robbers will make to having their prey torn from them. You must remember, sir, that if the young lady and child have been carried off by the band of outlaws, of whom the so-called three bastards of Monte Corro are the leaders, they will be assisted by all their associates; and they have many, both in Frankfort and Obenburg, who would assemble around them at a few hours' notice. Still, you must do as

you please; it is nothing to me. I would only humbly suggest that it is not advisable to weaken either the party which you will lead, or that which will be despatched in the direction of Obenburg."

Theodore hesitated for a moment in doubt. The crafty Nesmer had touched a tender chord when he spoke of the dangerous position in which Leah was placed. He hesitated, and looked around him before he spoke. The courtyard was now fast emptying; the sergeant's party had passed over the bridge, and were hastening in the direction of Obenburg. The band which he was to command were all mounted and drawn up, waiting for him to lead them forth. Mira, Renard, Van Pratt, Abraham Geld, and Janos were also mounted, and appeared to be impatiently awaiting the signal to depart. Janos was on a big Flemish horse, and looked every inch a warrior, his tall figure towering over the others as he sat, with black looks and scowling brow at the delay.

"Well, well," said Theodore, "perhaps you are right. There are sufficient men, doubtless, to defend the castle, and I will not further weaken our small band by detaching more. Bring my horse!" he cried to one of the troopers, who was leading a small half-bred Arab about the yard.

The horse was brought, and, vaulting into the saddle, Theodore Vanderpant took the head of the small force and galloped over the drawbridge, followed by the five associates and the soldiers.

Solomon Nesmer gazed out from an embrasure on the well-armed and mounted band as they wound their way down the hill, their steel scabbards and

accoutrements glittering in the morning sun. Theodore and Janos rode in front, each seeming eager to outstrip the other in the pursuit. Theodore's ardour arose from the hope of rescuing Leah from the hands of men whom he imagined were unscrupulous villains, and from whom she would be exposed to outrage and ill-treatment. Janos, on the other hand, cared not a jot for the object in view; it was enough for him that enemies to the realization of his projects of wealth were to be attacked. He neither asked nor wished to know more—his tiger nature was aroused when he discovered that it was not an apparition who stood before him with drawn sword in the chamber of death, and he wanted but substantial flesh and blood to attack, to give full vent to his ferocity.

Leaving the small band galloping across the country in the direction of the forest, return we now to Leah Geld and the three brothers.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECRET CHAMBER.

It will be remembered that immediately Janos the Hungarian, dropping his sword, flew in alarm before the supposed spirit of the murdered Ulric, Rudolph retired into the oratory, and the curtain was again drawn. Taking advantage of the confusion and terror which the flight of Janos occasioned in the others, he spoke a few hurried words to his companions, and tenderly raised the still insensible form of Leah in his arms. Then, placing his foot on a particular plank in the floor, Albert at the same time pressed forcibly against one of the panels behind the shrine ; a sharp click was heard, as of a spring released, and the panel flying back, revealed a narrow dark passage. Into this Rudolph plunged with his beautiful burden, the others following, and Ernest carrying the young heir of Monte Corro. Then was heard again the click of the spring ; the panel closed with a slight slam, and they were in total darkness.

This did not, however, interfere with their progress *as they passed* swiftly on, winding and twining again *and again*—sometimes ascending flights of steps, at *others descending*. Frequently they passed places

where they knew, by the sound, that they were only separated by thin wainscoting from some of the many rooms in the lower part of the castle; they could hear the noise of revelry and singing as they hurried silently on, and occasionally could distinguish faint gleams of light through cracks in the panelling. As they advanced the passage became broader and the air more damp and oppressive. At last, having threaded this gloomy maze for some half hour, they emerged, not into the light and air, but into a large open space. The darkness was profound; so Ernest and Rudolph rested for a moment with their burdens, while Albert cautiously groped his way to the wall, and, following it round, discovered the passage down which they must go.

"This way," he said, in a low voice. "I will go first; you follow."

Accordingly, they cautiously advanced in the direction of his voice, and found themselves descending a broad flight of steps. Down, down they went, until it seemed they were diving into the very bowels of the earth. They had descended many hundred feet, and still they were not yet at the bottom.

At last, suddenly, without any warning, the steps ceased, and they halted in what seemed to be an immense subterranean vault. The ground was soft and damp under their feet, and occasionally, as they wended their way cautiously across, they splashed up to their ankles in pools of water, into which the drops from the roof constantly dripped.

The darkness was so profound that they had to advance with the utmost circumspection, to avoid

stumbling and falling over the rough, uneven ground.

Albert, who had led the way, suddenly exclaimed—
“More to the right. I hear the horses’ hoofs.”

They paused, and listened ; surely enough, a faint sound could be heard, apparently at a great distance, as of horses’ hoofs impatiently pawing the ground. They altered their direction slightly, and pushed steadily on towards the sound.

Still there was no light, not one single ray, to relieve the monotony of the dreary darkness. Rudolph, with the still insensible girl, several times nearly fell as he stepped into one of the many shallow pits with which the place abounded. With great labour and perseverance, however, they made their way over the obstructing mounds of damp earth till they heard, close to them, the neigh of the horses, who recognised the approach of their masters.

“Thank God !” said Rudolph, resting his burden on the nearest steed, which he could feel, although he could not see. “Thank God ! we are so far in safety. Hold the girl, Albert, while I mount ; then give her up to me, and I will place her before me on the saddle. Poor young lady ! Doubtless, if she has recovered her senses, she thinks we are cruel ruffians thus to drag her away. She little knows that we are the best, and perhaps the only friends, who have the power as well as the will to aid her.”

Rudolph mounted his horse, and received from Albert his insensible charge. The others followed his example, Ernest remarking—

“We had better let the horses go their own way ;

they will find the path, and keep it, better than we could."

They did so, nor did they over-estimate the sagacity of the animals, who advanced at first slowly, hesitatingly, till, apparently satisfied that they were right, they increased their speed to an ambling trot.

After some ten minutes, they perceived before them a faint light shining down from above into the gloomy recesses of the cavern. As they approached, they perceived that it was the mouth of the Hell, through which a few struggling moonbeams managed to penetrate.

They now knew that they were right, and giving rein to their horses, dashed on at an increased speed, and passing under the yawning mouth of the Hell, approached the entrance to the tunnel. The clatter of their horses' hoofs rang like thunder in the silent gloomy cavern, and Rudolph could with difficulty make his voice heard.

"What about Claude, the chasseur? Has he left on his errand to our friends in Obernburg?"

"More than two hours since," replied Albert. "They will doubtless be at the post before ourselves; so let us push on, for time is all-important."

"True," said Ernest; "those villains have doubtless, ere this, discovered or guessed by whom their prey has been snatched from their grasp. However, they know not of our retreat in the forest, so we shall at least be able to rest and consult with our associates on a plan of action."

"What is your idea, my brothers, concerning this poor girl?" said Rudolph. "Where shall we place

her in safety? It is impossible for her to be with us, as God knows we have work enough to keep ourselves from the headsman. We cannot leave her to fall again into the hands of her enemies; it would be cruel and unmanly, as we well know the mercy she might expect at the hands of that villanous Portuguese doctor. He little thought, when he was unfolding his rascally plans concerning her to his accomplice Van Pratt, that there were those listening with both the will and power to defeat his schemes for the future and punish with a terrific revenge his crimes of the past."

"What is to be done with the girl? you ask," said Albert; "that is not easily answered. One thing is certain; Germany is no safe place for her and the child at present. As for ourselves, we are young and strong; and if we have bitter enemies, we have also true friends. We have eluded the bloodhounds so far, and I doubt not shall be enabled so to do, till God wills that we regain possession of our rights and take a signal vengeance on our own enemies and our father's murderers."

As he spoke, they arrived at the mouth of the tunnel, and dashing out at full speed, struck across the country in the direction of the forest, which could be seen in the distance like a black line on the horizon.

The ground was covered with snow, which was spread like a sheet over the landscape, lighting up the darkness of the night by its bright glare and reflection. The moon had set, and the first tinge of coming dawn might be discerned in the east. As they emerged *from the shadow* of the hill, on the summit of which

was the castle, they heard the loud clanging of the big bell of Monte Corro.

"Forward!" cried Rudolph, driving the spurs into his horse's flanks; "that bell will arouse the whole country. We must reach the wood before daylight, or some of the tenants, hurrying to the castle in obedience to the summons, will see us, and perhaps give such information as will involve not only ourselves in danger, but may lead to the discovery of our meeting-place at the woodman's hut."

Onwards they dashed over the glistening ground, the snow crackling under the horses' hoofs, as they urged them on by whip and spur.

Already Rudolph's horse began to show signs of fatigue under its double burden. All the horses were steaming and panting from the great pace, and the glossy black coat of Rudolph's was plentifully sprinkled with flecks of foam. Still the noble steeds struggled on with undiminished speed; they approached the borders of the forest, and just as the dull grey in the east was changing into the rosy glories of morning, they dashed into its welcome shelter.

"So far, so good," said Rudolph, reining in his horse. "We can now take our time, as it is not likely we shall meet any one in the forest at this early hour."

They trotted leisurely on, both steeds and riders glad to relax their hitherto headlong speed.

"What say you to France, Rudolph, as a haven of safety for the girl and child? We have, as you know, good friends there, and here her own father is powerless to protect her."

"Well thought of," was the reply. "But to whom

can we entrust them? Who shall convey them there? There is Claude, the chasseur—he is true as steel, but he knows not a word of any language but German; and though brave as a lion, he is as stupid as an owl. Once again, whom can we trust sufficiently?"

Ernest and Albert were silent for some time, and appeared to be deep in thought.

At last Ernest spoke. "What say you to our friend Lachrymalis? We can trust him, I am sure."

"But is he likely to be at the rendezvous?" said Albert. "I think it is a great chance if he is not at the present moment drinking bad beer and singing worse songs with some of the devil-may-care students of Heidelberg or Frankfort."

"No," said Rudolph, decisively, "Lachrymalis is sure to be at the hut. He delights in the idea of being a conspirator, and would not miss a meeting for worlds, more especially as he can drink as much beer and sing as many songs as he pleases, and at the same time enjoy the additional gratification of talking treason."

In spite of the seriousness of the occasion, and the memory of the appalling scene in the chamber of death at Monte Corro, Albert and Ernest could not help smiling.

"But do you think he will go?" asked Albert, doubtfully.

"Go?" replied Rudolph; "of course he will. Why, you don't know him as well as I do. Tell him it is on the secret business of the society, and he would start for Nova Scotia or Madagascar, and never grumble, so long as he was allowed to astonish the postboys by *roaring forth* revolutionary songs in that trombone

voice of his, and gladden the hearts of landladies by his prodigious orders for beer and Rhine wine on the road."

"Very well," replied Albert; "so be it. You know him better than I, and if you are content to trust him, it is sufficient. Still, I think you had better make him take a vow of abstinence till his mission is accomplished."

Albert replied, laughingly—"A nice escort, I am sure, for a young lady and infant. Well, all I have to say is, that when the girl recovers, sees him, and hears one of his choice songs, if she does not faint again, and the child go into convulsions, I shall be very much astonished."

All three burst into laughter at this speech of Albert's.

Strange that men in their perilous position, and who had just passed through so great a danger, and witnessed so horrible a scene, could laugh. But such was their invincible courage and flow of animal spirits, that, though never swerving from their purpose, they could look on the bright side of things, and laugh where others would be inclined to give way to despair.

They now slackened their speed to a walk, and turned out of the road through the forest towards a poor-looking hut, which could be seen through the trees at about two hundred paces. Although the dawn was just now breaking, still in the shade of the immense trees it was quite dark. A light could be seen shining from under the door and through the chinks of the shutters.

They rode up, and Albert, dismounting, knocked at

the door with the hilt of his sword. It was then that the horseman that rode into Monte Corro had seen them.

In answer to the knocking, Karl himself appeared with a light. He was an old rough-looking man, who had been born and bred in the service of their father, the Count Ulric. He saluted them respectfully. "Welcome, my masters," he said; "welcome. There are many friends of yours already here; they await your coming in the secret council-chamber. We feared you were not coming."

"We have been detained, good Karl," said Albert, "or we should have been here by midnight."

Karl held up the light he carried, and gave an exclamation of astonishment as his glance fell on the form of Leah.

"A lady!" he exclaimed; "and a young and beautiful one, by my faith! Where did your honour——"

"Silence!" said Rudolph, who had dismounted, taking Leah from Albert, and bearing her inside the hut; "silence, and make no remarks. Who is in the back room?"

"No one, your honour; all the company are below."

Rudolph advanced with his burden into the room in question, and laying Leah on a couch, endeavoured, by loosening her bodice and administering restoratives, to recover her.

"I am but a poor lady's maid," he said to his brothers; "but, in default of better, the fair damsel must e'en put up with me."

His efforts, unskilful and clumsy though they might be, were not unsuccessful. Perhaps the rapid ride and

the cold morning air had some share in the result; at any rate, the colour began to return to the young girl's cheek, and her bosom, relieved from the pressure of the bodice, heaved and fell as she drew several long breaths. Rudolph made a sign to Albert, who left the room and returned with a flask of wine. A small glass of this had a wonderful effect on her; she shuddered all over, and sighing deeply, opened her beautiful eyes, and endeavoured to rise.

Rudolph, however, prevented this, saying, "Lie quiet, lady, and do not be alarmed; you need rest after the fatigue and dangers you have gone through."

Leah, too feeble to resist, fell back, and, closing her eyes, endeavoured to remember all that had passed.

Gradually, one by one, the events of the past night returned to her memory. She recollected the death of poor Lady Margaret, the outrage of Mira and Van Pratt in binding and gagging her, the voices in the oratory, and the appearance of the Three Demons of Monte Corro. Then she had a dim memory of being borne through dark underground passages, out into the cold morning air; revived for a moment, she was aware that she was in rapid motion, on horseback, and enveloped in a cloak—that was all. When she again opened her eyes, she saw that she was lying on a couch in a tolerably well-furnished room. She knew at once, however, by the low roof and bare rough slabs, that it was but a cottage or hut.

Rudolph had divested himself of his cloak, and had thrown it, with his sword, upon the table. He stood near the door, in earnest conversation with his brothers and Karl, who had returned after leading away their horses.

She saw and recognised him at once as the man who had unbound her and carried her into the oratory.

She saw him, and did not doubt but that she was in the hands of enemies. Little did she imagine that in bearing her away from Monte Corro, at great risk and danger to himself, he had done that which should entitle him to her everlasting gratitude.

As she looked on him, his very beauty seemed to her hateful; his presence, to her mind, appeared but as foreboding more outrage—more ill treatment. She had now completely recovered, but nevertheless lay perfectly still, determined to feign sleep, and watch any chance of escape that might present itself.

Escape!—but what then? Where should she fly to? To Monte Corro? Her father, she thought, was still there. Yes, she would—if she could only escape from these men—make her way back to the castle. But she did not even know where she was. No matter; she thought surely she would meet some one who would direct, and perhaps assist her.

She heard the footsteps of some one approaching her; she gave one quick glance, which enabled her to see that it was Rudolph, bearing a light; then she closed her eyes, and feigned sleep.

Rudolph gazed on her for a moment; then, appearing satisfied, he left the room, and she heard the door closed and locked.

Then she opened her eyes again, and rising, gazed around her.

Her eyes fell on the cloak and sword which he left on the table. She hastened to possess herself of the sword. She drew it from its scabbard, and placed it

beside her on the couch, thinking that it might be useful to her in effecting her escape or defending herself from violence.

She then made a careful examination of the room; but, alas! could see no possibility of escape. Then she again lay down, reciting a short prayer, and determined to watch for every opportunity. In her weak state, however, nature was too strong for her, and she fell into a deep peaceful sleep.

When Rudolph left the room he called Karl the woodman, and inquired of him—

“Has my friend Lachrymalis arrived yet? I expected he would have been here?”

“Yes, captain,” was the reply; “he is asleep in the chimney corner. He finished the only four flagons of wine I had in the place, and then swore at me because I would not broach the hogshead which you ordered to be sent from Obernburg. He declared he would broach it himself with his sword, and I really believe he would if he could have found it; but as he could not, and I would not tell him, he went into the chimney-corner and swore at me and my sons by turns, till he went to sleep.”

“Broach it at once, then,” said Rudolph. “Bring up a flagon and glasses, and let him have as much as he pleases.”

“Very good, captain; shall I take some down into the council-room? They have had nothing but beer for these four hours, as I did not like to broach the cask without your orders.”

“Yes; take them as much as you like. But first bring a flagon here.”

Karl entered the large fireplace, and mounting a ladder which stood on one side, disappeared *up the chimney*.

Rudolph did not seem at all surprised, but, advancing to the other corner, where he saw a figure at full length basking before the dying embers of the fire, "Wake up, Lachrymalis," he said, very unceremoniously bestowing a hearty kick on his prostrate friend ; "I want you."

The only reply was something between a grunt and a roar.

A second application of Rudolph's foot, however, with increased force, had the effect of awakening the sleeper.

"What the devil is the matter?" he cried. "Here, you old Karl, give me some wine, or I'll break every bone in your carcass!"

Karl at this moment reappeared with a large flagon and glasses.

"Here you are!" said Rudolph, filling a bumper, and handing it to the awakened sleeper, who took it, and drained it off at a draught.

"Ah!" he said, rising and stretching himself, "that is better ; give me another, and I shall be all right."

"Wait a minute," said Rudolph, taking a glass himself, "till I explain what I want you to do."

"All right, old fellow," said Lachrymalis, helping himself coolly to another bumper. "I am at your service for anything."

"I know," said Rudolph, quite seriously, "that you are of no use till you are half drunk."

"Quite true," was the reply, as the speaker drained

another bumper. "I admire your penetration, my good friend."

"Now, in what time can you be ready to start on a journey?"

"Well," said Lachrymalis, thoughtfully, "I think I can manage it in about three hours. But what wine is this?"

"Why, can't you taste, stupid? It is the best Burgundy."

"Ah! that is a different thing altogether. I have not got my taste right yet after the beastly stuff I had last. Burgundy," he added, carefully sipping from his glass, "so it is. Well, then, I think I can manage to get myself round in an hour and a half."

Rudolph could not help smiling at his friend's idea of getting himself round.

"But what is it I am to do?" asked Lachrymalis. "Where am I to go?"

"Why, I want you to go to France, and——"

"Go to France! What now? How am I to go?—walk? By Jupiter, I never heard such a thing in my life!" And in his astonishment he set his glass down without draining the contents.

"Yes," said Rudolph, calmly, "you are to go to France; and as to what you are to do, you are to take over in safety, and deliver into the care of a French nobleman, whose address I will give you, a young lady and a baby; that is, if the former knows her own interest and is willing."

Lachrymalis seemed petrified with astonishment. "God bless my soul!" he cried; "a young lady and a baby! I never heard such a thing in my life."

"Well," said Rudolph, impatiently, "time presses. Will you go or not? Say yes or no."

"Well, old fellow," replied his friend, draining another bumper; "if you wish it I will go, of course. But a woman and a baby! God bless my soul! I never heard of such a thing in my life. This comes of belonging to a secret society."

"Here is money," continued Rudolph, giving him a purse containing notes and gold. "Claude will accompany you as far as the frontier. You will procure a carriage at Frankfort, and travel night and day till you reach your destination."

"Very good," was the reply, as he pocketed the purse. "I shall be ready in an hour and a half. Here, Karl bring me another flagon; this is empty."

The wine was brought, and Lachrymalis proceeded to make a vigorous onslaught on it.

Rudolph ascended the ladder, whither Albert and Ernest had already preceded him. The ladder led into a small chamber up the chimney similar to the rooms used for drying bacon in English farmhouses, where his brothers were awaiting him. A door from this room led to a flight of steps, descending which, they found themselves in a long, narrow passage, sloping downwards at an angle which made it difficult for them to keep their feet. They advanced along this in almost total darkness for about a hundred yards, till they came to a large wooden door at the end. Albert knocked three times, and *pulled a bell*. As they waited for it to be opened, *they heard the deep bellowing of Lachrymalis's voice as he indulged himself in a Bacchanalian song.*

Suddenly the door is opened, and they advance into a long room brilliantly lighted. A table runs down the centre, at which are seated some twenty men, mostly young, and bearing the impress of gentle blood. Piled up in the corners, under the table, and hanging everywhere from the walls, are fire-arms, swords, and spears. Several barrels of powder, a quantity of bullets, heaps of arms and accoutrements, sufficient for at least a thousand men, are scattered about in careless confusion. As the brothers entered, all rose from the table and saluted them ; some pressed forward, and with words of welcome shook them heartily by the hand. All seemed to look upon them with admiration and love.

They advanced to the head of the table, and taking three seats which were left vacant, motioned to the others also to be seated. Then Rudolph rose, and addressing the assembly, said—

“Comrades, I and my brothers have been unavoidably detained, or we should have joined you earlier. We will now, if you please, proceed to the business of the evening. I have to denounce to you, and propose as worthy of death, five men, whose names and descriptions I will now read to you.”

Drawing a paper from his bosom, he was about to read it out, when he was stopped by a violent ringing at the bell, and three loud knocks at the door.

One of them arose and opened it. Karl the woodman rushed in, pale with terror.

“The hut is surrounded by armed men,” he cried ;
“there are at least a hundred of them.”

Every one started to his feet, and hastened to arm

swords were buckled on, pistols and firelocks were reached down from the walls, and nothing could be heard for some moments but the rattle of the ramrods, and the clanging of the butts of the muskets on the ground. A confused murmur of oaths and exclamations arose.

"Silence!" said Rudolph, rising to his feet, and appearing to assume the command unquestioned.

Then there was a dead silence.

"Comrades," he said, in a loud, clear voice, "*the bloodhounds have hunted the wolves to their lair; now let us show them our teeth.*"

A loud shout of approbation greeted these few simple words.

"Let each man load three or more muskets," said Rudolph, when the noise and confusion had somewhat abated. "Albert, you will take four men, and see that the hut is as well barricaded as circumstances will permit. You, Ernest, will see that all the horses in the stable beyond are saddled and in immediate readiness. Take with you two men; the remainder will stay with me."

Albert departed with his men up the inclined passage into the hut, and in a few minutes had so barricaded the doors and shutters, by piling furniture and every movable article against them, as to render them perfectly secure, at least for some time.

Ernest hastily left the table, and passing through a door at the opposite end of the room to that by which he had entered, proceeded in all haste, assisted by two others, to saddle some twenty-five horses.

The place in which he found himself was a long,

low cave, excavated, like the other, from the solid earth.

The labour in forming these subterraneous retreats, with the secret passages leading to them, must have been prodigious, as not only must several thousand tons of hard earth and rock have been removed, but it must all have been conveyed away, as there were no signs of a mound above.

Another narrow passage, but not at so sharp an angle, led from this rough stable, and appeared to terminate abruptly in the midst of a pile of faggots.

While, however, his companions were still busying themselves about the steeds, Ernest ascended the passage, and, advancing into the hollow pile, cautiously pushed aside a faggot, and peered forth.

The sham faggot-pile was itself in the midst of a clump of brushwood, so that he could not succeed in getting a distinct view of the back of the hut, or the persons by whom it was surrounded. He could, however, easily distinguish, at times, mounted men riding backwards and forwards between the brushwood and the hut. He could also hear their shouts to each other, as they rode round and round in search of an undefended door or window to attack.

In this, however, they were unsuccessful, and at the command of some one under whose orders they appeared to be, they drew off to a short distance, still, however, completely surrounding the hut, and preventing all egress.

"Ah!" muttered Ernest, "they have withdrawn to consult on a plan of attacking; they have discovered that the hut is barricaded, and are to

cautious to attack till they know by what force it is defended."

The hut itself, as the reader already knows, was in the occupation of old Karl the woodman, and his son Ralph. The excavations forming the secret chambers, and the two passages, one leading to the chimney, the other to the centre of the apparently solid wood pile, had been effected by the three brothers and their associates.

Mixed up as they were in so many revolutionary attempts, and being so frequently involved in feuds and broils, either with personal enemies of their own or their late father's, they saw the necessity of some place of retreat, and proceeded with incredible labour to excavate these chambers in the solid earth, and having removed the soil to some distance, so that the presence of a mound might not reveal the fact, or give rise to a suspicion that there was something beneath, their next care was to connect these chambers with the hut itself, and also to provide a secret egress and ingress, which could be used by horses as well as men. Having accomplished this to their satisfaction, by the expedient of building over the mouth of the subterranean passage a hollow wood pile, they proceeded to transport to their retreat in the forest arms, ammunition, and provisions. As we have already stated, there were arms and accoutrements sufficient for a thousand men, nor was there wanting a good supply both of food and ammunition. Several times already the brothers *had found the woodman's hut, with its secret entrances and chambers, stand them in good stead; but never had they been so completely surrounded and brought*

to bay. They had, however, but little fear ; for, notwithstanding the odds against them, they placed confidence in their own determination, and the vast advantage which their large stock of arms and the secret passages must give them. Having, then, made as careful an inspection as circumstances would permit, Ernest replaced the faggot, and returned through the stable to the room in which he had left his friends.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUDOLPH'S PLAN OF DEFENCE.

RUDOLPH was giving orders as he entered.

"Pass up as many muskets as are loaded through the chimney, and down into the hut. Some of you follow my brother Albert, who is engaged in barricading, and assist him to loop-hole the slabs, and prepare to let these hounds know that they have made a mistake, at all events in attacking us in our lair."

In obedience to his orders, some half-dozen loaded themselves with firearms, which they carried up the passage; then one of their number mounted into the room in the chimney, and taking them from the others, handed them down to Albert and those who were barricading the hut itself.

Soon there were in each corner, and strewed about the floor, large quantities of loaded muskets and pistols. Then, by Rudolph's orders, two barrels of powder and a quantity of bullets were sent up from the secret chamber.

"Where is Karl, and Claude, the chasseur? Send *them to me at once*," cried Rudolph, who still remained *in the lower chamber* with about a dozen companions, *who were all armed, and waiting the signal of their*

leader to ascend the passage and join their companions in the hut.

One of the party left to summon Claude and Karl.

"How many do we number, comrades?" asked Rudolph, as he proceeded to place in his belt a pair of large horse-pistols.

"There are thirteen here," answered one of the party, a tall, handsome young fellow, who seemed to assume a sort of command over the others after Rudolph and his brothers. "Then there are eight in the hut; then there are Albert, Ernest, your friend Lachrymalis, Karl, his sons, and Claude—twenty-seven in all."

"Come," said Rudolph, smiling, "that is not so bad: we could defend the place against a hundred with half the number we have."

At this moment Karl and Claude came into the chamber.

"Claude, my good fellow," said Rudolph, "I shall require you to go on a journey immediately. You must start on the very first occasion you see of escaping. My friend Lachrymalis will accompany you, and I will give him full directions. It is necessary to our interests that the child whom we have brought from Monte Corro should be placed in safety; also the young lady, who is in the back room above. You will take the child under your especial charge. You will also have to attend to my friend and the young lady on the road. You must ride on horseback to Frankfort or Obernburg; then you must take a carriage and make all possible haste till you reach the

frontier, on reaching which you can leave them. My friend has received my instructions, and is amply supplied with money, which you can use without stint."

Claude bowed respectfully and said—

"Your commands shall be obeyed, sir; as you well know, my life is at the service of yourself and your noble brothers!"

"Thanks, good Claude. Now, comrades," he added, addressing the others, "this is what I propose to do. Our enemies have not yet attacked us—probably they hesitate to commence till they have formed some definite plan. Whatever that plan may be, I think we cannot do better than wait until we are attacked. Their efforts will doubtless be directed against the hut, as they know nothing of the secret entrance. We will receive them with a sudden and rapid fire. As we have plenty of arms and ammunition, each man can rapidly discharge two, three, or even more pieces. This will have the effect of doing great havoc in their ranks, while it will induce them to believe that we are a greater number than is the fact. We will station a few with the horses, to guard against the wood pile being accidentally discovered. When they are disheartened and thrown into confusion by our fire, if they do not at once fly, all will hasten to horse, and, removing the faggots, dash unexpectedly into their midst from the clump of bushes. This will thoroughly confound them, as they will imagine it is a reinforcement arrived. What say you, my friends? Do you think it is well?"

Loud cries of approbation greeted him from all

hands. None could deny that Rudolph's plan was wise and skilful; and they did not doubt for a moment that, led by himself and brothers, who never seemed to fail in anything they undertook, they would defeat the besiegers with ease.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEAH'S DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCE.

RUDOLPH then prepared to leave.

"Six of you will remain here for the present, and keep a look-out from the faggot pile, but on no account whatever fire a shot, or do anything that would lead them in the direction of the brushwood."

Six accordingly passed through the stable, and, ascending into the hollow pile of wood, listened and peered cautiously out, having first slightly moved a part, so that they could see without being seen.

Rudolph, with the others, went in the other direction, and, passing through the chimney, descended into the hut itself by a short ladder, placed there for the purpose.

A few shots had been fired, and one or two bullets had penetrated the door of the chamber in which Leah was confined. Rudolph saw the necessity of removing her to a place of safety, and determined to have her carried by the secret passage into the council chamber.

Rudolph now determined to make arrangements for giving the besiegers such a repulse—dealing them such a blow—as should teach them, at all events, the neces-

sity of caution in attacking a place so well defended by such determined men.

"Now," he cried, "let each man arm himself with a musket, and two others against the wall, within reach of his hand. Let each man see that his pieces are loaded, and look carefully to the priming."

This also was done, and all awaited in silence for the next order of their gallant young leader.

"Now," he continued, "let two of you station yourselves at the window, one at each side, and be in readiness when the word is given to unbar and take down the shutter, and replace it again rapidly when three volleys have been given."

He was obeyed.

Albert, during this time, was looking out from a very small chink in the slabs at the besiegers, who had drawn off a little, preparatory to making a final assault on the hut. Deceived by the silence which now reigned within, and by the fact of there having been only three shots fired, they imagined that there were very few defenders. Accordingly Mira, with the approbation of the young lieutenant, determined to advance at once, and selecting the window as the easiest point of attack, to dash in the shutter with the butt-ends of their muskets, and force an entrance in that manner.

Meanwhile their every movement was carefully watched by Albert from the hut, and by Ernest from the woodpile in the brushwood behind them.

Having made the above arrangements to give the enemy a warm reception, Rudolph opened the door of the room in which he had left Leah, intending to

explain to her the necessity of her being moved to a place of greater safety.

It will be remembered that, shortly after Rudolph left the room to descend into the council chamber, Leah Geld, weakened and wearied by the fatigue she had undergone, fell into a deep and peaceful sleep—a sleep which is only known to the good and innocent—a sleep in which she left all her cares, troubles, and dangers behind her, and wandered in spirit, in the happy haunts of her childhood. Away, far away, in joyous dream land, she thought she was wandering over green fields strewn with flowers, and bubbling brooks and sparkling fountains. She thought she was again with the companions of her childhood. She thought that the unfortunate Lady Margaret, the miserable wife of old Prince Gunther, her dearest friend, was leaning, as of yore, fondly on her arm. She thought also that she saw approaching the handsome, boyish form of Theodore. She imagined in her dream that she was advancing joyfully to meet him, when suddenly a figure appeared before her between them. The figure waved her back. She gazed on the unknown with astonishment and admiration. It was the form of a young man of some eighteen or nineteen summers. A tall, graceful form, with all the freshness of youth combined with the well-built limbs of manhood. He was attired in a large red cloak, a hat with black plume, and he wore heavy jack-boots which reached far above his knee. And his face! She gazed, and thought she would never be tired of gazing—it was angelic in its beauty. The lofty brow, the thin Grecian nose, the *small mouth* shaded by a slight moustache, the chin

and neck as gracefully moulded as those of the Apollo Belvidere; and then the eyes, those large, dark melancholy eyes, she thought she had never seen their like. Then she thought that, throwing open the long cloak, the figure opened its arms—a bright smile illuminated its face, and the eyes seemed to beam with love, and implore her pleadingly to come to him.

Bewildered, fascinated, by the strange weird beauty of the unknown, she was on the point of rushing forward and throwing herself into his arms, when her eyes fell on Theodore, who, she thought, was sorrowfully regarding the scene. Then a change came over the countenance of the unknown cavalier. The smile faded from his lips; an expression of the deepest melancholy succeeded it; and the imploring look of those large sad eyes changed to one of deep grief. She thought that in his sorrow he looked more beautiful, more godlike than before. He turned sadly away, as if to leave, but before he could move a step, Leah, unable longer to resist the strange fascination of that singular beauty, rushed forward and threw herself into his arms.

Then she awoke with a start. She looked around her, and in a moment remembered all, and realized her situation. She saw the door open. It was the shooting back of the bolt that had awakened her. Strange that she should have slept through all that din of arms and be awakened by the simple opening of a door, but so it was. She saw by the light of the solitary lamp a figure advance towards her.

She recognised the unknown cavalier who had appeared in her dream ; she remembered then it was the same figure who had unbound her in the oratory, who had carried her off ; the same who left his cloak and sword on the table.

At the same moment she heard a loud voice cry—
“Down with the shutter, boys, and give them a volley !”

Then, through the open door, she saw the shutter in the other room suddenly removed. A flood of light poured in, and she saw a body of men, some on horseback and some on foot, surrounding it.

Suddenly she recognised Theodore at their head. He was on foot, and seemed to be encouraging his men.

She arose, and was rushing out to call his aid, when Rudolph interposed, and pushed her back. He said some words, which, in her excitement, she did not catch.

His face wore the same sad, melancholy expression which she saw so vividly in her dream. Again she saw Theodore, now quite close to the window.

Returning hastily to the couch she had left, she snatched up the naked sword.

It was a long straight sword, with here and there a deep notch, which showed where it had done its owner good service.

It was almost too heavy for her fair hands to wield, but, exerting all her strength, she raised it above her head with both hands, and advancing to where Rudolph stood, still barring her exit with his person,

dealt him as powerful a blow as her feeble arm was capable of.

Rudolph did not see her take the sword, as the room was dark and the lamp gave but a feeble light.

Although the strength of Leah was small, the very weight of the sword was sufficient to inflict a desperate wound.

Down it descended, full on his bare defenceless head.

The bright sharp steel inflicted a deep gash across his forehead. He placed his hand to his head and staggered forward towards the girl, who still held the terrible sword. The blood rushed from the wound and plentifully besprinkled Leah's dress, as he reeled and fell at her feet. Then he fainted.

For one instant the girl looked down at her work and shuddered.

There he lay, with the blood streaming from the deep gash, and flowing among his beautiful dark hair. His pale, upturned face seemed more beautiful in death than even in life, and his eyes, although half closed, seemed to gaze into her face with a reproachful expression.

True, she considered that she was justified in the act, to regain her liberty, and perhaps preserve herself from danger and outrage; but still there seemed something cruel and treacherous in thus striking down unawares an unarmed, defenceless man.

She remembered, then, too late, that he had always treated her with tenderness and respect. She remembered that he had saved her from the hands of the

villain Mira. She remembered all this, and the thought flashed across her mind, that perhaps, after all, he was *a true friend*.

The idea was horrible. If it should be so, and she had treacherously slain him! A sudden revulsion of feeling took place in her mind, and she would have given worlds to have recalled her act. Throwing down the fatal sword, she knelt by his side, and raising his head—pale, bleeding, but still beautiful—she burst into tears. Her gentle nature, for a moment goaded into fury by her supposed wrongs, realized itself in a passionate fit of weeping, as she tried to find some sign of life in the young and handsome man she had so treacherously slain.

“Oh, sir! sir! sir!” she exclaimed, passionately; “pray speak! Say that I have not killed you! My cruel hand! how could I have done such a dreadful deed?”

But Rudolph gave no sign of life; the blood still flowed from the wound on his brow. Leah was in an agony of grief, and her tears fell plentifully on the pale upturned face of her victim. All this, though taking a considerable time to relate, did not really occupy more than a minute at the utmost.

In the meantime Mira, Nesmer, and Van Pratt were earnestly urging their men to attack the hut, and old Abraham Geld offered a hundred pounds to the man who should recover his daughter. He was in perfect ignorance as yet of the part Mira had played *in binding and gagging her*, and supposed that she had *been carried off* by the same lawless adventurers who *had stolen the child*, which latter theft threatened to

deprive him both of the money he had advanced and the estates.

Leah, although she was aware of the villany of Mira and Van Pratt, and felt certain they had committed an atrocious murder, yet thought also that she had been torn from the castle where she might hope for the protection of her father by lawless and unscrupulous men, for their own purposes, whatever those might be.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ATTACK AND THE REPULSE.

THE assailants joyfully advanced, not seeing, in the gloom of the hut, the thirteen defenders, who were as far from the window as possible.

They saw them not, nor the levelled muskets which were soon to prove so deadly.

On they came, led by Theodore, and were now quite close to the open window.

Then Leah, as she knelt over the body of Rudolph, heard, in a loud voice—

“Aim well, comrades!” then a short pause; then the single word—“Fire!”

Well was the command obeyed. With a report as of a single musket, all were discharged with deadly effect.

Forth hurtled the leaden storm from the narrow window, dealing dreadful havoc among the close ranks of the enemy. Every bullet took effect; down they went; down went foot soldier and horseman, and nothing could be heard but cries and groans.

For a moment the survivors were staggered, but they had received are inforcement, no other than the *sergeant's party* who had just arrived from Obern-

burg. Theodore, also, was unhurt; and he gallantly led them on again to the attack.

Onward they came, the soldiers burning with rage at the slaughter of their comrades.

"Forward, my brave fellows!" shouted Theodore, waving his sword, and leading the way. "We have them now; they cannot escape."

They were within half a dozen yards of the open window of the hut, from which the smoke of the last deadly discharge was sullenly flowing, when a voice within was heard—

"Spare the young officer, comrades; he is our friend."

Theodore was lost in astonishment at these words; but before he had time to think, again came the loud, clear order—

"Fire!"

Again from the open window of the hut belched forth the flash of the muskets and the death-dealing bullets.

Down go the foremost on the bodies of their comrades who had fallen in the previous attack. Again were heard the shrieks of the wounded and dying as they rolled and struggled in agony.

Theodore was no longer visible; he had been seen to stagger and fall. Doubtless, some stray bullet had struck him, and frustrated the kind intentions of Albert, who had given the order to spare him.

Janos the Hungarian, although in front, by the side of Theodore, escaped unhurt. The brave Chevalier Renard, however, who in his deep regard for the safety of his person had kept well in the back-

ground, was not so fortunate. Albert and Ernest both saw him, as he sat his horse some thirty or forty yards in the rear, and a little on one side of the line of fire. His craft availed him little, for from the dark recess of that small window two long barrels are aimed at him—two firm, steady fingers press the triggers, and the leaden messengers of death whistle forth to bury themselves in his bosom. With a cry of agony he falls from his horse, and is rolling and gasping in the convulsions of death. The treacherous friend, and murderer of his benefactor, the Viscount Raymond Camille, has at last met his just doom. The unerring aim of Albert and Ernest had sent the bullets one through his heart, the other through his lungs; and in less time than it takes to write it, naught remains of the gay chevalier but a pale, ghastly corpse.

Their leader gone, and a third of their number wounded or dead, the survivors hesitated again to attack that dreadful window.

Janos the Hungarian dashed to the front, and, fearless as a lion, endeavoured to lead them on again.

But it was useless; and, to complete the rout and slaughter, as they turned to fly, once again was heard the stern command—

“Fire!”

Once more the simultaneous report of the muskets is heard—once more, too, the deadly bullets whistle forth from that dreadful window.

Once more are the cries of the wounded heard as the *well-aimed* volley takes fearful effect among their *flying ranks*.

For a few moments the survivors, who have re-

treated to the shelter of the wood, see the smoke issuing through the window from the gloom of the hut; then the shutter is again put up, and all is silent within.

Soon after the shutter was again closed there commenced from the hut an irregular sputtering fire; every chink, every splintered plank seemed to spit forth a bullet whenever any of the attacking party ventured to show themselves from the trees.

To return this fire was almost useless, as the bullets merely flattened against the thick wooden slabs. Accordingly the force, which still numbered nearly a hundred men, drew off to a safe distance; still, however, surrounding the hut.

They had lost between thirty and forty men by those terrible volleys from the open window.

CHAPTER XXV.

RUDOLPH AND LEAH.

WITHIN the hut none was, as yet, killed, though several were wounded by stray shots. When the smoke of the rapid discharges had somewhat cleared off, and they had again loaded their muskets in readiness to repulse another assault, Albert, looking around, missed Rudolph.

He inquired of one of his comrades if he had ascended the chimney to go to the council chamber, where some eight or ten of their number were under the command of Ernest.

"No," was the reply; "he has certainly not gone that way, as I and two others took up our position there before the shutter was taken down, and the volleys fired. The last time I saw him he was about entering the back room. He said something about some young lady, who was to be removed to a place of safety."

Albert now observed, as the dense smoke cleared away, that the door was partially open.

Astonished at his brother's prolonged absence at *such a time*, he advanced into the room.

The smoke had penetrated here also, enveloping *everything* in a mist-like obscurity.

The lamp still burned on the table, and Albert, taking it up, held it above his head, and gazed around.

Well might he start, and utter an exclamation of astonishment, at the sight which met his eyes.

He saw the senseless form of Rudolph stretched at full length near the door.

Leah Geld was still kneeling by his side, and in her grief and horror at the deed, was endeavouring to pour something from a small flagon between his pale lips.

Albert exclaimed—"Good God! he is wounded; some stray shot must have struck him. Here!" he shouted to the others; "come here, some of you fellows, my brother is wounded."

Several then entered; and Albert having motioned Leah on one side, they raised Rudolph's senseless figure, and carried it into the other room.

"Strange!" said Albert, examining the gash in his head; "this does not look like a bullet wound, and yet it must be. How else could he have received it? And yet I never saw anything so like a slashing sword-cut."

"It was no bullet wound," cried Leah, who had followed them; "it was a sword-cut." And she burst into tears again, and hid her face with her fair hands, to shut out the horrid sight.

Albert looked in astonishment on the girl. He could neither comprehend her words nor her passionate grief.

"What mean you, lady?" he said. "How could it have been a sword-cut? who could have inflicted it?"

"It was I that did it," she cried, wildly; "I struck him with his own sword which he had left. He entered the room unarmed, and wielding the sword with all my strength, I inflicted that dreadful gash. Indeed—indeed, I did not wish to kill him; I only wished to make my escape. O God! I would give worlds to recal the deed. Although he and you have forcibly carried me off, rather would I have endured worse than have his blood on my soul."

"Girl!" cried Albert, starting up from his knees, and grasping her arm, "know you what you have done? You have treacherously and foully murdered a true and loyal friend. Know you not that, to save you from the grasp of Mira, with whose base designs on you we were acquainted, Rudolph, the man who now lies dead by your ungrateful hand, himself carried you from Monte Corro here—from that castle where, if you had remained, you would have been forced to become the mistress of Mira or die? Know you not that it is Mira and his band who but now attacked us, desiring to get you again in his power?"

"But my father—where is he? and why am I forced from him?"

"Your father is powerless to protect you, and is himself a victim of the arts of those villains; they will surely be the cause of his ruin—perhaps disgraceful death!"

"Oh, heavens!" cried Leah, "what is this I hear? Theodore the Lieutenant, too, where is he? I saw *him* a short time ago."

"And I saw him also," said Albert, with a bitter smile; "and I ordered our friends to spare him; and

I also saw, after the discharge that stretched so many of our foes lifeless on the ground, Mira, the Portuguese doctor, take deliberate aim at him from behind a tree. I saw him fall, shot in the back. Wretched girl!" he continued, throwing her from him, "it was part of Mira's plan to get Theodore away from the castle with but few of his own men, and then, when he had acquired possession of you, to make a prisoner of him also. Our desperate resistance has caused him to alter his plans. Seeing a favourable opportunity, he gratified his revenge, and sought to serve his interest by treacherously murdering. Now go, if you choose," he said, tauntingly; "the door shall be thrown open to you. Go, join Mira, and be his mistress, if it so please you. Methinks you would be well matched—a murderer and a murderess."

Leah felt most bitterly the full force of these cruel words—words which, however bitter they might be, she was unable to answer. She did not for a moment doubt the truth of Albert's words. As she looked on his noble face, and noticed the same singular beauty as in that of Rudolph, she saw, she knew that he spoke truth.

The blinding tears came into her eyes, and she was unable to speak for choking sobs.

"Lift him, and carry him gently into the council-chamber," said Albert.

They did so, and he himself followed them. Then, by the aid of cordials, and cold water plentifully dashed over his head and face, they endeavoured to bring back the spark of life. It almost seemed that they were about to be successful, for shortly Rudolph gave a few gasps and opened his eyes.

"Wine—wine—give me wine!" he cried in a faint voice.

It was given to him, and, Albert raising him, he took a long draught.

This seemed to revive for a moment the failing powers of life.

"The girl, Albert!" he said, in feeble tones; "see that she is taken safely either across the frontier into France, or restored to her father. Let it be as she wishes. O God!" he cried, falling back on the couch on which they had placed him; "I am dying."

They raised him, and poured down his throat a draught of strong cordial.

This revived him, and he again spoke. "You will do this, will you not, Albert? It is the request of your dying brother. I must have been wounded by a stray shot," he said, faintly smiling. "Anyhow, it matters not; I am laid low at last. I only wish I could have lived to avenge our father's murder; but that I know you and Ernest will not fail in doing."

"A stray shot!" said Albert, indignantly. "No, it was not a stray shot; it was that ungrateful girl, Leah Geld, who thus treacherously wounded you. Curses on her traitor hand!" he added, vehemently. "I have a great mind to thrust her from the door, and let the murderess fall again into the hands of Mira!"

"No, no!" cried Rudolph, with as much energy as his weak state would allow. "It was not the girl. She did not do it; or, if she did, it was an accident; or, perhaps, she thought I was an enemy. Promise me!" he cried, earnestly, extending his hand feebly towards his brother; "promise, Albert!"

Albert took the hand of poor Rudolph, and, with tears running down his face, replied—

“Noble heart! which even at the approach of death can think of the welfare of another, and that other the one who has so treacherously brought you to this sad pass. I promise, Rudolph, since you wish it. I promise, by our father’s memory, that I will place the girl in safety, as we originally intended.”

Rudolph seemed satisfied with these words, and fell back exhausted by the exertion. Ernest had now joined them, and knelt with Albert by the dying Rudolph.

Suddenly he started up.

“Did you not say,” he cried, “that Van-Pratt was among our assailants?”

“Yes.”

“Good! We must make him a prisoner at all hazards.”

“Why so?”

“Know you not that the crafty villain always carries about him an elixir whose virtues are so wondrous, that if but one spark of life remain it can be kindled into a flame? One drop, diluted with water, and poured on yon ghastly wound; a few drops poured between the lips—and our brother would recover!”

“True!” replied Albert, joyously; “I had forgotten. We must indeed obtain possession of the villain, and when we have taken from him the precious elixir, we will give him a long rope and a short shrift.”

“No time must be lost,” cried Ernest. “To arms, comrades! We must make a sortie, and carry off the villain Van Pratt from the very midst of his men. It

is a dangerous undertaking, but it is our only chance of saving our brother's life. Is there any man here who fears to go? Is there any one man here who refuses to strike a blow for Rudolph of Monte Corro, the true friend, and brave, loyal gentleman?"

"No, no!" shouted every one, enthusiastically. "We will all go."

All were soon armed and in readiness for the attack.

Meanwhile poor Rudolph seemed fast sinking, and it appeared almost certain that he would be dead before they even started.

His breath grew weaker and weaker; the cordial no longer had its wonted effect. Albert, who is kneeling at his side, bathing his head, can no longer feel his heart beat; his eyes fix and glaze with a deadly, ghastly stare; his features settle into an expression of calm repose; the mists of death gather round him, and his brother is bending over a cold and lifeless body.

Ernest hastened along the passage into the hut to make arrangements with those of the band who were to remain there.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SORTIE.

THE plan of action on which they determined was as follows :—

Two-thirds of their number were to issue silently forth by the passage which led into the hollow wood pile. The other third were to remain and guard the hut ; also to open the door for them to return when they had secured their man.

This would have the effect, in all probability, both of concealing the fact that the sortie issued from the hut, and would also lead the besiegers to think that the party in the hut had received a reinforcement.

All were now ready. Those who were to form the attacking party were all armed and waiting anxiously in the underground stable for the signal to be given.

Albert, before leaving, once more approached the lifeless body of his brother.

"Alas!" he cried, "I fear it is too late ; even the diabolical skill of Van Pratt cannot restore the dead to life. Rudolph—brother!" he added, taking the cold hand of him he had loved so well in life ; "adieu ! I am too late to save you now. Death has too surely *laid his cold hand* on you. But I swear by our father's *grave that not one man of the enemies who have been*

the cause, though not the immediate one, shall escape a horrible death."

Then he turned, and taking the head of the small party, they advanced up the passage, through the opening in the wood pile, into the clump of brushwood in which it was situated.

They advanced into the open clump, and hesitated, to reconnoitre the position. They could perceive their enemies in all directions around the hut.

There was one particular group which especially seemed to excite the attention of Albert and Ernest. It was a group of horsemen at the further side of the hut from which they were.

"Yonder is Van Pratt," said Ernest, "talking to that big fellow in the dragoon uniform; we must make a bold dash for him."

It was indeed Van Pratt, who was on horseback in the centre of a group of about a dozen. He appeared in earnest conversation with Janos, and by his gestures seemed to be deprecating an immediate attack, which the other as vehemently urged.

Van Pratt also frequently turned in his saddle, and gazed anxiously down the forest-road in the direction of Monte Corro. He seemed to be expecting the arrival of some one, and was evidently counselling the fiery Hungarian to wait.

"They have sent either to Monte Corro for more men, or to Frankfort for Government assistance in capturing us," said Albert. "In either case it is a serious matter, as already they outnumber us four to one."

"No," replied Ernest; "Van Pratt will never call

in the aid of the Government troops, as their presence would interfere with his own plans. It is true he might by that means soon bring an overwhelming force against us, but he would be as far as ever from the accomplishment of his object. Think you they would allow him to retain possession of the girl and child? No; trust me, Van Pratt is not so spotless himself as to wish for the company of the bloodhounds of law. But, Albert, I tell you what I think it is probable they have sent for."

Ernest paused, and Albert gazed anxiously in his face.

"You know that at the old castle there are several pieces of field artillery—small, old, and not very serviceable—but quite sufficient to knock the hut about our ears in half-a-dozen rounds."

Albert looked very serious, and appeared lost in thought; then he said—

"You are right, Ernest. I was trying to remember whether the field-pieces in question were not entirely useless; but now I call to mind, there are at least three which, although they have not burnt powder for the last ten years, could still be cleaned up and made available. It is indeed a serious matter, for I doubt not that Van Pratt is too crafty a villain to forget the overpowering advantage they would give him."

"Time presses; we must get in their rear as unobserved and quietly as possible. Then, at a given signal, all must rush on the group in which is Van Pratt, and, before they have time to recover from the astonishment which so sudden and desperate an attack

will throw them into, we must bear off by force this ruffian doctor."

"Agreed!" muttered his companions, in a low tone ;
"and the signal!"

"Shall be the discharge of my pistol," replied Ernest. "Now disperse yourselves ; and, by creeping cautiously from tree to tree, by a long circuit, get in their rear."

The clump of bushes in which the little band was concealed was about a hundred yards to the rear of the hut. Between them and the hut itself were several groups of the besiegers ; so that, if they advanced in a straight line towards Van Pratt, they would have to fight their way through enemies as well armed, and more numerous than themselves. Even if they succeeded in cutting a passage through these, their intended prey would of course be alarmed, and have no difficulty in putting himself in safety, as he was on horseback. For these reasons, then, they determined to scatter, make a wide sweep, and suddenly pounce down on their rear.

To carry this design into effect, they first retreated rapidly some two hundred yards farther from the hut. This they had no difficulty in accomplishing unobserved, as they were effectually concealed by the clump of bushes. When they thought they had gone far enough, they spread out in both directions, some to the right, some to the left, intending to describe two large semicircles, and meet again at the road in the rear of Van Pratt and the other leaders. Then a careful observer might have seen dark forms creeping slowly and cautiously from tree to tree. Silently these

figures flitted about among the giant pines, at first going in different directions, but soon beginning to converge again towards one point.

Those who were inside could, by straining their eyes, just catch occasional glimpses of the dark forms gliding among the trees in the gloom of the forest. They held their breath, for they knew, by the rapid converging of these forms, that they were on the point of dashing on the foe. Suddenly they heard a cry, then the report of a pistol-shot, followed by a loud shout of many voices. Then waked they up their fire, and the sharp rattle of the musketry was succeeded by the hissing and sputtering of the bullets among the trees.

The attack was so sudden and impetuous, and the effect of the fire from the hut so deadly, that the enemy were scattered in the greatest confusion, and never had a chance to make head against their assailants. Many took to flight, among whom were Nathan the Jew and Solomon Nesmer, while many more fell by sword or bullet. Albert singled out Van Pratt, who could not escape so quickly as he wished by reason of the rush and crowd. Van Pratt was mounted, but this availed him not. Clearing the way before him with his sword, Albert leaped on the horse and seized Van Pratt around the neck, with the intention of dragging him off.

Exerting all his strength, Albert threw himself from the horse, and tore his enemy with him. Both fell together and rolled in the dust, but still our friend *did not relax that choking grasp. For a moment more they rolled and tumbled together. Then Albert ro*

dragging Van Pratt up also, and still holding him furiously by the throat. Then he proceeded to drag the choking, gasping wretch towards the hut. Van Pratt had now almost ceased to resist. All strength was gone from him, and he felt helpless in that iron grip. With muttered curses and furious rage, Albert dragged him over the rough ground towards the hut, whose inmates saw his success, and greeted him with a shout of encouragement. Lachrymalis followed him, turning every now and then, and, by swinging his iron bar around, keeping at bay some of Van Pratt's party, who seemed inclined to rescue. Still Albert kept on his way, furiously tearing the now almost insensible Van Pratt towards the hut. The blood flowed from the wretch's mouth and nose, as Albert remorselessly dragged him over the rough ground—now dragging him along smoothly for a few yards where the ground was even, and he offered no resistance; now hurling him forward with a terrific force, when he attempted to struggle, or when any obstacle interposed.

"Mercy, mercy!" gasped the choking wretch.

"Mercy!" muttered Albert, between his set teeth; "yes, dog!—such mercy as you gave shall you have."

Again he dashed forward, dragging his enemy with him. They were now within half-a-dozen yards of the hut, and were closely followed by some ten or twelve of the enemy, who saw in the capture of Van Pratt an end to the hopes of the plunder and reward he had promised them.

The door of the hut was opened; but Albert determined not to enter with his brother and the others, ~~they~~ were now separated from him by such of Van

Pratt's men was had followed in the hopes of rescue. Accordingly he halted, and raising Van Pratt as easily as if he had been a child, pitched him, with all his force, into the door of the hut, which was now open, and about which their friends were gathered, occasionally firing when opportunity offered of their doing so without endangering their friends.

Van Pratt was seized by a dozen willing hands, and quickly made secure.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LIFE OR DEATH ?

NEVERTHELESS, Van Pratt did not give up all. He saw through the door, around which several men clustered, the arrival of a fresh party.

"Van Pratt," said Ernest, sternly ; "listen now, and pay heed, as you value your life. Bring a rope," he said to one of his companions.

The rope was brought, and Ernest, throwing it over a beam, made a noose in the end, which he placed round Van Pratt's neck. Then, dragging him to his feet, he made him mount a stool, bound as he was. Shortening the rope, so as to leave just about a foot slack, he fastened the end securely, and drew the noose tightly round the prisoner's neck. Van Pratt was livid with terror, and the cold drops of perspiration burst forth on his brow, and trickled down his ghastly face. With his arms tightly bound behind him, mounted on a stool with a rope round his neck—sufficiently tight already, but which, he well knew, could be made to compress his windpipe with murderous force, by only one kick by his captors—on the stool he was mounted on, he felt utterly helpless, and knowing the ruthless, lawless character of the men into whose hands he had fallen, he almost gave up hope.

and stood in an agony of terror, expecting each moment that his support would be dashed from under him, and himself gasping, struggling, choking in the agonies of death.

"Now, sir doctor," said Ernest, "once again attend to me, for your life depends upon it. I know, my worthy friend, that you are a skilful physician—a very skilful physician—and have the power to cure wounds and diseases when all hope seems gone."

Van Pratt wondered what was coming, and now faint gleams of hope returned to him.

"We have, as you are perfectly aware, several men wounded in the late attack. There is one man in particular with whom you have especial concern, for if he dies you die. It is my brother Rudolph. What say you—will you cure him? I give you five minutes, at the expiration of that time you die if your skill avails you not."

Ernest advanced his foot, and placed it on the edge of the small stool, as if about to hurl it from him, and leave the prisoner dangling in the air. Van Pratt trembled with mingled feelings of rage and fear.

"Answer!" again cried Ernest—"yes or no."

"Yes."

"Good."

"Is he badly wounded?"

"Desperately."

Leaving Van Pratt still on the stool with the rope round his neck, Ernest and Albert carried the insensible body of Rudolph, and, spreading out their *cloaks*, laid him on the floor.

"Unbind me; these cords choke me," said Van

Pratt. "I have an elixir, and will try its power; it never yet failed."

They unbound his arms only, but at the same time slightly loosened the rope round his neck. Then Ernest said, "Give me the elixir."

Van Pratt tore a very small object from the lining of his vest, and with trembling hands held it towards Ernest, who took it, gazing curiously upon it. It was apparently made of solid silver, and was covered all over with strange devices, inlaid upon it. It partook more of the nature of a lady's vinaigrette than anything else. It resembled, both in size and shape, a large walnut, and was closed at each end by two small stoppers. These stoppers were of ivory, and one was coloured black.

"One drop! only one drop!" cried Van Pratt.

Ernest withdrew one of the small ivory stoppers, and carefully let fall one single drop between the lips of Rudolph.

He waited and watched anxiously for the effect.

Van Pratt gazed with staring eyes to discover the effect he hoped for; but instead of gazing in the wounded man's face, as did Ernest, he fixed his eyes upon the wound. The blood had long since ceased to flow.

"Another drop!" he gasped, in an agony of fear, for he knew that his time had almost come.

Ernest carefully followed his directions, and again let fall a drop of the liquid from the small silver vessel. This, however, seemed to produce no better effect than the other, and Ernest turned sternly towards Van Pratt, who still stood on the stool with the cord round his neck.

"Dog!" he cried, fiercely, "you trifle with me."

Then the small repeater he still held in his hand pealed forth the hour with a sweet musical tinkle.

But to Van Pratt it seemed to ring forth with a horrid, threatening clang. He heard in the small sound his death-knell.

"Mercy!" he cried, clasping his hands, appealingly—"mercy!"

Ernest laughed scornfully, and with a rapid movement of his foot, dashed away the stool.

Then commenced a horrible scene. Van Pratt struggled fearfully in his choking agony. Wildly, helplessly, he threw his arms about, and endeavoured to grasp the rope above. In vain, for each time that he partially succeeded and strove to lift himself, and ease the dreadful pressure around his throat, Ernest, who stood by, calm, impassive, like a very avenging angel, forced him to relinquish his hold by striking him on the hands with the hilt of his sword.

The miserable wretch fought and struggled with the desperation of despair. He fancied in the delirium caused by the blood pressing on his brain, that he could see a grim, gloomy shape, the form of the murdered Gunther. Furiously he struggled, his eyes protruding, blood gushing from his nose and mouth, and his hands and finger-nails turning black, as the slow process of strangulation went on. Still he continued his desperate struggles, each moment adding to his horrible appearance.

Several turned away from the dreadful scene; but Ernest stood immovable, regarding the terrible struggles of the dying wretch with an almost fiendish satisfac-

tion; with folded arms he stood, and saw with a stern joy the convulsive heavings of the ghastly object before him. Suddenly his attention was called away by a cry from one of his companions. Turning, he saw with astonishment that Rudolph had moved. As he gazed almost incredulously, he distinctly observed a motion in the limbs. Although he had so calmly surveyed the struggles of Van Pratt, he now trembled with excitement. He hastened to the side of the supposed dead man, and was now convinced that life still lingered. He still held in his hand the silver vessel containing the elixir; quickly he removes the ivory plug, and administers another drop. The effect was marvellous, for Rudolph, after a few shudders, opened his eyes and gazed around him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE EFFECT OF THE ELIXIR.

THEN the blood spurted afresh from the wound, threatening again to extinguish the faint spark of life which the elixir had fanned into a flame. Cold water dashed on his head and face for a moment arrested it, and at the same time had the further effect of recovering him. He raised himself on his elbow, and gazed around him. His long insensibility had effaced all recollection of the events of the day. His eyes wandered around the hut, till they fell on the form of Van Pratt, who was still struggling feebly, and swaying to and fro. A slight cry escaped him as he perceived the horrible object. This cry called the attention of Ernest to the strangling wretch. Quickly drawing his sword, he severed the rope with a blow—the body, which had now almost ceased to give evidence of life, fell heavily to the ground.

“Loosen the rope, one of you,” he said; “I passed my word to let him live, if his skill was successful; and even to such a wretch as that it shall be kept.”

The rope was loosened from his neck, and Ernest, taking a vessel of water, dashed it over what now appeared a hideous blackened corpse.

“Open the door and throw him forth,” said Ernest.

"If he is alive, let him live till he falls again into my hands; if he is dead, the crows of the forest will make a meal off his dainty carcase!"

Ernest's orders were obeyed to the letter, and the hideous blood-stained body, with its swollen head, protruding tongue, and dreadful staring eyes, was contemptuously cast forth. Ernest now turned his attention to his brother; and having succeeded in tying up the artery, proceeded to administer a draught of wine—no bad medicine in Rudolph's exhausted condition. His recovery now was almost marvellous; and in the course of half an hour he was enabled, with a little assistance, to mount the ladder and descend into the secret chamber. As they passed down the passage they met Albert. His astonishment and joy at seeing his brother Rudolph was unbounded; he had given up all hope, and could scarcely believe his eyes.

"God be praised!" he cried, grasping Rudolph by the hand; "we had thought you dead. Your presence will inspire our brave companions with fresh courage. No time must be lost; we must leave this without delay, for they have now brought artillery against us."

"What of their movements?" said Ernest. "Have you been enabled to observe anything?"

"The danger is imminent; they are making ready the field-pieces. It was to inform you of this, and that the horses were all ready, that I came."

"Come," said Ernest, "let us mount and away. Once on horseback, it will be no difficulty to make a dash through our foes, who have had already a pretty severe terror."

All were now assembled in the council chamber.

and waited but the signal to mount and charge through their assailants.

Rudolph was now so far recovered as to be able to walk without assistance, and resumed the command unquestioned.

"Let us do nothing rashly," he said; "it is now evening, and in a short time we may escape unseen. You must remember that, before we can leave our retreat with safety, it is necessary to strike such a blow as will effectually prevent our foes from following. Then, too, the girl whom we have brought from Monte Corro must be despatched in safety—also the child. Nor can we leave our trusty friend, old Karl, and his son, for these men to wreak their vengeance on."

"But if we wait till night," said Albert, "they will have knocked this old hut to pieces. The cannons are small, it is true, but still they are cannons, and a cannon-ball is a very different thing from a bullet."

"Once again," said Rudolph, decisively, "we cannot leave till night casts its shadows over us, or till we have utterly dispersed and routed our enemies."

"What, then, do you propose to do?"

"Wait."

"So be it, then," said Albert. "Meanwhile, let us make every preparation, either for further attack or defence. I will return to the wood pile and watch their movements."

"You, Lachrymalis," said Rudolph, "had better see about changing your dress, and binding up that wound in your arm, preparatory to starting; and, Ernest, it will be well if you apprise the girl that it will be necessary for her to leave shortly, and accompany

was impossible, he was soon sufficiently recovered to busy himself about the guns, which he did with an eagerness evincing the hatred burning in his bosom and his desire for revenge. Even when his voice returned to him, and he was able to make himself understood, his words were few and short. He did not seem to care to enter into particulars, but hurried on the preparations with a feverish impatience very different from his usual methodical way of proceeding.

Soon the guns were so far cleaned and in order as to warrant an attempt at firing them. Accordingly, they were each loaded with a heavy charge of powder, and the shot rammed down. Van Pratt himself pointed the piece, and applied the light to the touchhole. Bang! went the cannon. All watched anxiously to see the wooden slabs fly as the shot struck. But the ball did not go near the hut, merely tearing up the earth some thirty yards on one side.

It was evident from this first trial that no dependence could be placed on the accuracy of the cannon. Again and again were they fired, with but little better result; the muzzle was depressed, lowered, pointed to the right or left, still the truant ball would insist on going everywhere but where it should. For the first ten or twenty yards it appeared to go straight enough, but then it invariably struck the ground, and bounding off at a tangent, spent itself harmlessly in the forest.

All efforts to remedy this were unavailing; it was evident that the bores must have been injured.

Accordingly, Van Pratt desisted from firing, and

drew on one side to consult with Janos and Mira. Their consultation did not last long, for they soon seemed to have made up their minds to a course of action.

Now the besiegers commenced to drag two of the cannon towards the hut. Encouraged by Mira and Janos, they approached so near that one discharge must certainly blow the place down about the ears of its brave defenders.

They advanced on the side opposite to the window, so that those within had no opportunity of repelling them by their fire.

"Now," said Van Pratt, who had fully recovered, "round with the guns, and fire!"

In obedience to his commands, the soldiers rapidly turned the muzzle of the field-piece towards the hut. Van Pratt himself laid it straight, and stood by with lighted match. One moment he hesitated, and approached the match to the touch-hole.

Meanwhile, what were the three brothers and their companions doing while these preparations for their destruction were being made?

Their horses were saddled, and everything in readiness for a start.

Rudolph and Albert remained in the wood pile intently watching the movements of the enemy; while Ernest had returned to the hut to apprise Leah that it was necessary for her to prepare to leave.

She was conducted down the secret passage into the council-chamber unresistingly. In fact she was so utterly wretched and heart-broken, that she was incapable of offering any objection.

Meanwhile, Rudolph and Albert had seen from the wood pile the plan of action determined on by their enemies.

They saw the cannon being dragged towards the hut, and knew that, unless prevented, they would certainly knock it to pieces. Suddenly Rudolph, who had now quite recovered, cried—

“Ah! I believe they are going to wheel the guns quite close up; if so, we have them. Albert, haste and carry one of the barrels of powder up into the hut; ascend the chimney, and wait till you hear a pistol shot; first place a short fuze in the powder-keg, and when I give the signal light it, and throw it with all your force among them. Let it fall as near the guns as possible. It will explode almost instantly, and will do fearful havoc amongst those crowded around. At the same time we will sally out from the wood pile, and falling upon them ere the survivors have time to recover from their alarm, shall easily cut them to pieces and disperse them. Haste! already they have the cannon almost close.”

“Now, my comrades,” cried Ernest, “to horse! and at the report of Rudolph’s pistol dash out on these hounds; cut and thrust, do your best, and, if possible, let none escape. You, Lachrymalis and Claude, will remain behind and await the success of the attack; then watching your opportunity, dash out, leading by the bridle the horse that the lady is riding, and gallop off in an opposite direction to where the conflict is going on, and make the best of your way to Frankfort. You will possibly escape unseen. Once arrived at Frankfort, you know what next to do. “Come,

lady," he continued, "you must mount and away, unless you want to fall into the hands of good Nathan once more."

Leah shuddered, and hastily mounted, assisted by Lachrymalis, who had changed his clothes, bound up his arm, and made himself somewhat presentable.

All now left the council-chamber, and mounting their horses, rode up the incline till the foremost were in the wood pile.

Lachrymalis, Claude, and Leah Geld were last, Claude holding by the bridle a horse for Albert, who was absent in the hut, awaiting the signal to throw the powder-keg amongst the enemy.

Rudolph, who still waited, saw them bring up the gun quite close to the hut; he saw them turn it round, the muzzle almost touching the wooden slabs. One moment he waited, then he took aim and fired his pistol amongst them.

The last echo of the report had scarcely died away, when Albert threw the powder-barrel, with the fuze lighted, right in their midst. It fell quite close to the gun, to the touch-hole of which Van Pratt was just applying the light. For a few seconds the fuze hissed and sputtered.

It reached the powder, and a terrific explosion ensued.

The cannon was overturned, and the soldiers around hurled to a distance; legs and arms were blown off, and altogether a scene ensued baffling description. In a moment the hut was in flames, and a dense smoke hid almost everything from view. At the sound of the explosion, and before the horrified

vivors could recover from their consternation, the mounted band issued from the wood pile. Falling on them with a loud shout, Rudolph, Ernest, and their companions attacked them furiously. No quarter was given or asked for; one by one the besiegers fell with cloven skulls and hideous wounds. It was soon over; in less than five minutes not one remained of all their force to dispute the passage of the desperate band. Now Lachrymalis dashed out from the faggot pile, leading the horse of Leah Geld and followed by Claude with the child. As they galloped across the open ground, and struck into the road for Frankfort, Lachrymalis distinctly perceived a horseman riding on before them.

It was Nathan Mira, who had escaped the effects of the explosion in an almost miraculous manner. Lachrymalis little knew this fact, or he would have hesitated ere he spurred on after the most deadly enemy of the young girl who was entrusted to his safe escort.

Meanwhile the fight outside the hut had ceased, none remaining unwounded to contend longer.

"Comrades," said Rudolph, who was still panting with excitement, "the time has now arrived when we must part. Our mutual safety requires it. The news of this bloody fight will soon fly to Frankfort, and our good friends of the Government will never let pass such an affair as the slaughter of some hundred men, although it was done in self-defence. So now we will *each go our own way, nor meet again until this shall have passed over.* Meanwhile, my comrades, wait and *watch.* The time for our vengeance has not yet ar-

rived ; when next the summons to assemble together reaches you, be assured it will be for no idle purpose. Once again, my brave friends and companions, adieu ! In the name of myself and brothers I thank you."

Then Ernest, Albert, and Rudolph shook them each by the hand, and the daring little band, who had so terribly defeated their enemies, parted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LEAH ESCAPES TO FRANKFORT.

LACHRYMALIS and Claude rode on, and gained quickly on the horseman ahead.

Leah, glad to escape from the horrors of the hut, urged on her horse, and even outstripped her escort in her desire to be away from the scene of so many horrors.

They still gained on the horseman in front, who appeared to be urging his steed to the utmost. Still he did not make rapid progress, for his horse appeared to be either lame or wounded. They were now at the foot of a small hill, up which the horseman was frantically urging his beast. In vain—the steep ascent effectually prevented him from increasing his speed. It was evident, from his frequent glances backwards, that he thought he was pursued.

They were now within a few hundred yards of the fugitive, and would soon have been sufficiently near to recognise the features of Mira, but at this moment Lachrymalis' horse stumbled and fell, throwing him to the ground. Leah Geld reined in her horse, while Claude rode slowly on. No damage was done to either horse or rider. The horseman in front had now ar-

rived at the summit of the hill, and disappeared from their view.

Lachrymalis mounted his horse and galloped after Claude, who was some distance ahead. Leah rode on in deep dejection ; she had not seen Rudolph since his recovery by means of the elixir, and still believed him dead. She knew not where she was going, but suffered Lachrymalis to lead her horse by the bridle unresistingly.

She was an excellent horsewoman, and had no difficulty in keeping her seat, notwithstanding the rapid pace at which they rode.

Lachrymalis reined in his horse, and turning in the saddle looked back towards the spot where the late terrible conflict had taken place. Leah, who seemed like one in a dream, did the same, following his glance with her own. She saw a group of mounted men at the place where the path to the hut struck into it. They seemed to be separating. She distinctly saw the cloaked forms of two of the brothers, as they one by one bade adieu to their comrades. Knowing nothing of Rudolph's wonderful recovery, she of course thought him dead, and did not seek among the group for the third, or she might have seen him also.

She saw him not, as the two whom she did see rode off alone for a short distance, while he remained behind giving some parting directions to poor old Karl the woodcutter.

"Come, lady," said Lachrymalis, "let us on ; it is already nearly dark, and we have some ten leagues yet between us and Frankfort." With a deep sigh of sorrow Leah turned her horse's head and rode on. Th

horseman whom they had before seen ahead had disappeared, and they rode on down the hill at a quick pace. Lachrymalis and Claude concluded that he had disappeared in the distance, but it was not so. From out of the bushes on one side of the road glared a pair of fierce bloodshot eyes. The horseman had dismounted immediately he was out of their sight, and concealed himself there to await their passing. The man was, as the reader knows, Mira. A smile of triumph passed over his face, as he recognised Leah, and saw that Claude carried a child.

"All is not lost yet," he muttered. "They go to Frankfort—good; I shall not be long behind them. Once let me get them again in my power, and not all the accursed bastards in the world shall save the honour of the girl or the life of the child."

Then he slowly and painfully mounted his horse, which had been badly hurt by the explosion, and rode on after them.

CHAPTER XXX.

ABRAHAM FOLLOWS HIS DAUGHTER.

LEAH GELD and her escort arrived safely at Frankfort, but too late at night for her to think of seeking shelter in her father's house. Besides, she was in utter ignorance of his fate, and, by the advice of her strange companion, thought it better to seek accommodation at an hotel. One of the mysterious brothers who had carried her off, and yet were apparently her friends, had advised her to stay at a small hostelry he mentioned, and had promised early on the following morning to bring her news of her father. Accordingly, she and Lachrymalis wended their way thither, and apartments were secured without difficulty for him, Claude, and herself.

Worn out by fatigue and anguish of mind, the young Jewess soon after retiring to her room sank into a sleep and dreamed of Rudolph of Monte Corro and his brothers.

Let us return now to the forest and see what became of Abraham Geld and the conspirators. After the last desperate onslaught on the hut, all of the besiegers scattered in wild confusion. It was a *sauve qui peut*, and each sought his own safety only. The

old Jew, despite his anxiety for his daughter, fled and concealed himself in the brushwood until the brief and bloody fray was over ; then he issued forth from his hiding-place with fear and trembling. He was cautiously approaching the hut in the hope of finding his daughter, when he observed a horseman riding straight towards him. It was too late, even had he wished it, to fly, so he stood his ground. It was Rudolph of Monte Corro whom he saw, and reining in his horse, when quite close, accosted him :

"What are you doing here, old Jew ?" he said, in contemptuous tones ; "and what seek you ?"

"I seek my daughter, thou man of blood !" replied Abraham, undauntedly, even angrily, for he had recognised in Rudolph one of the three who had been described to him, and who had carried off his Leah. "Where is she ? render her up to me, or fear my curse—my vengeance, and the curse and vengeance of the Almighty, whose servant I am."

"Silence, old infidel !" cried Rudolph, angrily. "I am in no mood to put up with thy insolence."

"I will not be silent !" the old man cried, in tremulous accents. "My daughter, my daughter !—what hast thou done with my daughter, thou wicked, godless man ?"

"Your daughter is safe, old fool ; and if you would see her again, keep thy tongue quiet."

"Safe ! safe !—my Leah ! Where is she ?—lead me to her !" cried Abraham, trembling with excitement.

"She has gone on to Frankfort ; and if you are wise you will not seek to follow her. You will soon pay the penalty, for a trusty friend of mine will denounce

you all as a murdering gang—justly due to the executioner.”

“I know not what you mean,” said Abraham, turning pale. “I have done no wrong——”

“No wrong!” cried Rudolph, hotly. “Is murder no wrong, thou wretch?”

“O Lord! O Lord! Murder!—I have done no murder; I but sought to recover my own.”

“If with your own hands you have not taken life, your villanous accomplices have. But a terrible retribution awaits them. Two have already gone to their last account. The murderer’s doom awaits you and the other Jew, Nathan Mira, and the accursed Van Pratt. Fear not that my vengeance or the anger of the Almighty will sleep. Old Jew, thy life shall be a curse to thee; and but for thy daughter’s sake, even now I would hang you from a tree!”

“Leah—my daughter! Where is she? I will go to her!” cried the old man, frantically.

“Accursed dog of a Jew! I have told thee that thy daughter has been sent on to Frankfort. Follow if thou choosest, and rush upon thy fate, miserable old dog!”

With these words Rudolph turned his horse’s head and rode away.

“Did he speak the truth, this godless man? ’Twas he and his fellows who carried off my daughter and the child. And yet a something tells me that he does not in this deceive me. I will go to Frankfort with all speed. God of Abraham, what a fearful scene!”

And so muttering, he gazed shudderingly around on the ground about the hut, which was strewn with

the dead and dying. He made a wide circuit, and having struck the road, made the best speed his tottering limbs and feeble frame would allow in a direction he thought would take him out of the forest into the open country. Before him he saw riding away in the distance the forms of the three brothers who had carried off his child and wreaked so terrible a vengeance on their pursuers.

The old man knew not at present the villany of Nathan Mira and Van Pratt; he knew not their fate, or what was in store for himself, but hurried on in the fond hope of reaching some village where he could get a conveyance and rejoin his daughter.

The night closed over the gloomy forest just as the old Jew emerged from it, and just as twilight deepened into darkness he could make out at a distance of about a mile a village on the summit of a little hill ahead. Hither he bent his faltering steps, his only thought, his only hope, being to rejoin his daughter, his beloved Leah.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LEAH DENOUNCES THE MURDERERS.

By the first dawn of day Leah Geld was awakened by a knocking at her chamber-door. In reply to her inquiry, the waiting-maid said—

“There is a cavalier below who says he must have speech with you. His horse is covered with foam, as though he had ridden long and hard. He will give no name but ‘Rudolph,’ and says that he has news of your father.”

Leah arose, and hastily arraying herself, descended into the public room of the hotel, which at that early hour was empty.

She saw when she entered the figure of a tall man, dressed in a large cloak, and with the leaf of a large hat nearly concealing his face, standing by the stove at the far end of the room.

She advanced towards him timidly, and recognised Rudolph of Monte Corro, whom she scarce knew whether to regard as friend or foe. He turned towards her as she approached, and bent on her a half-pitying glance.

“She, at least, is not to blame for her father’s sins,” he thought. “She was faithful to our sister Margaret

to the last, and she was beloved by her. Nevertheless the curse of her race, the curse of her father's crime, will surely pursue her."

"My father, sir—what of my father?" she said.

"Your father is safe and unhurt," he replied. "He is coming on to Frankfort, although I cautioned him not to do so. And you, what think you of doing?"

"I shall do my duty," she said, proudly. "Jewess—daughter of an accursed race though I be, I will bear witness to confound the guilty and bring them to their just doom. A most foul and cruel murder has been committed. My eyes witnessed it, and my lips, please Jehovah! shall denounce the murderers."

She drew up her tall, graceful form as she spoke, and her dark eyes flashed with a wild gleam. Rudolph gazed admiringly on her beauty, which now seemed to have something terrible, threatening in it. No longer did he see before him the weak and trembling girl, but a fervent, impassioned woman—a prophetess—a Judith capable of hurling forth a fierce denunciation, of slaying a Holofernes.

"But suppose that your denouncing the guilty should implicate your father?" he said, gently, for he could not gaze on her beauty unmoved.

"My father is innocent. He may have been weak, but not criminal."

"It may be so; for your sake I trust it is. Know you who are the guilty men?"

"Yes, I know. One is Van Pratt, the murdered prince's alchemist; the other they call Nathan the Jew. I have only seen him once, and then by the dim light of the corridor and the sick room. He is

as desperate and murderous a villain as ever breathed."

"And yet he is a Jew."

"A Jew—yes!" she cried, angrily, "and wicked enough to be a Christian!"

He took no notice of the taunt, but said, quickly—

"And you mean to denounce them?"

"I do."

"Even though you implicate the old Jew, your father?"

"He is innocent; and even were he guilty——"

Her eyes blazed for a moment, and her lips parted.

"Would you denounce him?" asked Rudolph.

"I know not," she replied, sadly. "I loved the Lady Margaret, Christian though she were; and my heart burns with anger against the murderers."

Rudolph remained silent for some time, gazing on her sadly as she stood before him in all her dark and splendid beauty.

"I have come into Frankfort, at the peril of my life, to warn you of your danger," he said. "I myself am a proscribed man. Evil days are in store for you and yours. The sins of the fathers will be visited on the children. I foresee for you a life of misery and persecution. Already, stirred up by the priests, the people rage against your people, and want but an excuse to kill, rob, and destroy. I pity you from my heart; I pity you, Leah—for such I heard your father call you. But I cannot aid you. *Would that you were not a Jewess!*" he said, looking admiringly on her,

"And, thank Jehovah, I am not a Christian!" she cried, warmly.

"Adieu, Leah. I wish you well," he said, in tones of mournful sweetness which fell like music on her ear.

Overcome by a sudden impulse, she threw herself on her knees, seized his hand, and passionately kissing it, burst into tears.

He raised her gently.

"Once more, adieu, Leah. We may meet again."

"No, no," she cried, wildly. "God, in his mercy, forbid! I know you not, sir," she said; "but your presence exerts a strange, a fatal influence on me. Leave me; I thank you—leave me."

She pressed her hands to her heart, and appeared to gasp for breath.

"Leah, adieu."

And then he left.

"Gone! gone!" she muttered to herself. "Gone for ever! For ever, I hope—I trust so. And yet there is a music in his voice, a softness in the glance of his dark eye, that melts my soul. I have a vague dread, a presentiment, a fear, that we shall meet again, and yet not all a fear, for there mingles with it a wild hope, a delightful dream. No, it must not be—away, unworthy thought. He is a Christian, the enemy and persecutor of our race. Daughter of Judah, pray to the Lord of Hosts for strength."

Then the Jewish maiden fell on her knees, and prayed to the God of her fathers.

"It is gone," she murmured, as she rose. "I feel strong again now, and fit for my task."

She went to her chamber and carefully arranged her disordered dress, sending out into the town for any articles she wanted with the utmost coolness and self-possession. She took from the bosom of her dress a packet of papers carefully sealed.

"The Lady Margaret gave me these, and charged me religiously to guard them, saying that they would confirm the inheritance of the estates to her child, and after him to her brothers, whom I have called the three bastards. I have accepted the trust, and will faithfully carry it out. Now, I have another duty—to denounce her murderers."

* * * * *

Leah faithfully kept her word. While Abraham Geld was toiling on towards Frankfort, in the hope of again embracing his daughter, and while Nathan Mira was prowling about the city in search of Leah's retreat, determined to compass the death of the child and her destruction, Leah was standing in the Court-house of Frankfort, and relating a tale of horror—a tale of brutal and cowardly murder, which made every cheek flush with indignation.

But when she had performed her task overwrought nature gave way, and she was carried to her father's house delirious from a burning fever which seized her.

Mira and Van Pratt were seized, as was Solomon Neamer. Mira accused Abraham Geld, the Jew, as having been the instigator of all. He adduced proofs showing on the face of them that the old man would have been the greatest gainer by the death of the prince and his wife; and furthermore, to save his life

he renounced Judaism and embraced the Christian faith. He found ecclesiastics willing to throw the mantle of the Church over the convert, and the executioner, in his case, was cheated of his due. But the last penalty of the law was rigorously enacted on Van Pratt and Nesmer; while old Abraham Geld, who, more sinned against than sinning, was beguiled into the plot, was sentenced to banishment from the city and kingdom. Furthermore, all his property was declared confiscated. His house was pillaged, and he, old Ruth, and his daughter Leah—yet weak, and but half-recovered from the fever—were turned homeless and penniless on the world.

Before that, however, the child on whose behalf the papers had been entrusted to Leah by the Lady Margaret, died; and as no documents could be found at Monte Corro to substantiate the claims of the three brothers, the estates, castle, and domain were declared the property of Government.

A general outcry was made against the Jews; the synagogue was burned, and this unfortunate and persecuted people driven forth on the world, bearing with them the unjust curses and execrations of the inhabitants. And then commenced a sad and dreary pilgrimage—old men, women, and children, were all driven forth, for the most part penniless and shelterless. It seemed that the curse which had so long followed their race acquired fresh force, and that they were to be scattered to the four winds of heaven—outcasts alike from their own country, and in all others.

On the trials, sorrows, and miseries of these unfortunates, among whom were Leah and her father,

we will not now dwell. Despite of all, a lingering vision was ever before the Jewish maiden. She had prayed she might never again meet the Christian Rudolph. She did so no longer, for she bore with her the papers which should establish his title to the dominions of his ancestors. And steadfast by hope, her faith in her own religion, and by reason of her own fervent deep nature, the Jewish girl wandered with her people, and bore uncomplainingly the miseries it pleased Providence to inflict.

P A R T II.

CHAPTER I.

SIX YEARS AFTER—LEAH A HOMELESS WANDERER.

SIX years have rolled on—six years, which brought a mixture of pain and pleasure to most of mankind—six years, during which human passions, evil and good, had sway, and as for all time, wrought their effects.

Six autumns had the ripening corn, the heavily-laden vine, the rich orchards, brought joy to the heart of the farmer.

Six feasts of Christmas had passed—to all believers seasons of joy and thanksgiving. Spring, with its budding leaves and sprouting verdure, had six times gladdened the heart of man ; and summer had as often warmed the heart with its balmy breath, making the young joyous, and the old feel young. But for the poor out-cast Jews six years of misery, of humiliation, of want, and poverty. To these poor wanderers, who seemed to be deserted alike by God and man, autumn brought no golden grain, no well-filled barns, no groaning wine-presses running over with the ruby juice. The merry *Christmas* time brought to them no mirth ; and the *very crosses*, the emblem of the Christian faith, were

but so many tokens to this unfortunate race of persecution and bitter hate from the disciples of Him who bade men "be charitable in all things," and who was himself the harbinger of peace on earth, good-will towards men.

Six years had passed over the head of Leah the Jewish maiden. We left her a girl, almost a child—we behold her a woman of noble presence and commanding beauty—a woman whose natural goodness of heart six years of unjust persecution could not quite harden, although there had been imbued during that time in her heart a fierce hatred of the Christians, who persecuted and oppressed her people with so relentless a hand.

There burned in the breast of the young Jewess a bitter sense of the wrongs she, her father, and her people had suffered; and though the feeling scarce amounted to one of vengeance, yet, should ever the cry be raised, "To your tents, O Israel!" it is certain, in her bitterness of heart, and in full conviction of the justice of her cause, she would have essayed the part of a Jewish Joan of Arc—a Judith. Her countenance was calm and impassible, severe in its pale beauty. The classic outlines of her features were seldom disturbed by emotion, but at times, at some fresh insult or memory of past wrong, a very tempest of passion would sweep across the lovely and hitherto calm visage. Leah's was a nature not to be trifled with. Gentle, loving, at times impassioned, but ever deep and steadfast.

Let us see how it has fared during those six years with the other personages of our story. Abraham Geld has been visited with a terrible affliction. He

is totally blind, and wholly dependent on his daughter Leah and old Ruth, who still accompany him. Nathan Mira disappeared, unable to bear the execrations and the opprobrium of all good and bad—Christians and Jews; for the apostate, the informer, and the spy are alike unanimously despised by all nations and by all parties. We know the fate of Nesmer, of Janos, and of Van Pratt.

There remain the three brothers of Monte Corro. Already compromised as they are by their lawless lives and many desperate adventures, it seemed almost hopeless for them to assert a claim to the castle and estates. Nevertheless, after the death of their sister's child, they did so, and at the head of their companions, with whom they had defended the hut, they took possession, and actually bid defiance for a time to the authorities and the law. But such rashness, such madness, could have but one end. A large military force was brought against them; and though they defended the castle with the utmost bravery and determination, it was taken by storm. In the assault, Ernest and Albert fell, and Rudolph was made prisoner. When brought to trial, he persistently asserted his lawful title to the castle and estates, declaring that by the ancient tenure of the domain it was his despite his illegitimate birth. But among all the archives of the family no proof could be found of his assertion. He declared that the papers which would prove his claim had been abstracted, for that he had often seen *them*—that his sister Margaret had shown them to *him*, and had often declared that she had them in her *own keeping*, and that should she be childless, or her

offspring die, they should be forthcoming to prove the right of her half-brothers to the estates. But these papers could not be found, and Rudolph's assertion was disbelieved.

These were the documents which the Lady Margaret had entrusted to Leah, charging her to keep them safely and deliver them on occasion to her brothers. For six years the Jewish maiden had fulfilled her trust, but had no opportunity of giving them. During the life of the child they were useless; it was only after his death they became valuable; and after her interview with Rudolph at the inn, she had not seen him or his brothers again. Shortly she and her people were ignominiously banished, and compelled to leave all and lead a wanderer's life. Rudolph was imprisoned for a short time, and then sentenced to ten years' banishment from his native land. His return was punishable by death. But he had no object in returning. His brothers were slain, as were most of his friends; and collecting what little funds he could, he took his departure and was heard of no more in the scenes of his exploits and adventures. Let us follow him in his exile.

CHAPTER II.

THE STYRIAN VILLAGE.

A SHORT distance from the foot of the northern slope of the Alps, in the Austrian province of Styria, there lies in a fertile valley or plateau a village called Graffenstein. Blessed with a splendid climate and a fertile soil; capable of producing both corn and grapes, the primitive inhabitants, if they knew nothing of the pleasures, were exempt from the cares and vices which trouble the dwellers in towns and more thickly populated neighbourhoods. This quiet little village contained something under a thousand inhabitants. It was governed by one Lorenz, the village magistrate, a man respected alike for his justice and his benevolence. Worthy Father Hermann divided with him the pleasant labour of ruling and keeping in order the little community, and seeing that the yearly tribute was paid to the officers of the Emperor's government.

Count Ulric, Rudolph's father, owned a small farm here. Years before his death he had given it to his sons. But in the days of their lawless and wild adventures the brothers scorned the quiet seclusion of the Styrian village. It was not so now, however, with Rudolph. Now that his brothers were slain, and him

self banished, the little farm offered a welcome retreat, and hither he bent his steps on leaving Frankfort an exile. He was tolerably well supplied with money, and taking possession of the farm, at once commenced to cultivate it. The soil was fertile, and after the first year it yielded him an income which made him the richest man in the village next to the worthy Lorenz.

His noble bearing, his generosity, his handsome face, and evident superiority, soon caused him to be both loved and looked up to ; and his sway over the hearts of the villagers rivalled that of Lorenz and the worthy priest. Over the heart of Madelina, the pretty daughter of the good Lorenz, the handsome and gallant Rudolph had, without intention on his part, obtained complete and absolute sway. His manner and bearing—so calm, dignified, and grave—with his handsome person, had completely captivated the village damsel. Madelina looked up to him as a hero—at once the best and the bravest of mankind.

It was long before Rudolph was aware of his conquest ; although, in his careless gallant manner, he had often whispered soft words to the maiden—words which might be, and which by her were, interpreted as words of love.

Madelina was pretty, graceful, and gentle as a fawn, with soft blue eyes, fair hair, and a loving heart.

By degrees Rudolph began to feel the effects of her grace and gentleness ; and at the end of five years, during which time he had watched her grow from a child into a girl, a girl into a woman, he scarce ever passed a day without calling on the worthy Lorenz

and strolling in the pleasant grounds with his pretty daughter.

Rudolph had been for about three years a resident in this happy valley, when there was a new arrival at the village. This was a middle-aged man, of morose and by no means pleasing countenance. He was dark, and wore a thick short beard, whiskers, and moustache, which was evidently not of long growth. His eyebrows were bushy and overhanging, his hair growing low down on the forehead, producing, with his black beard, a most unpleasant expression of face.

He called himself Bertolf, and on his arrival purchased a cottage and a small plot of land, and announced his intention of becoming a permanent resident. His appearance and his motive in selecting that remote village for his abode were much canvassed. Some suggested that he was a criminal who sought safety from the consequence of his crimes; others, that he came to the village with sinister motives—perhaps as a spy—as if there were anything to be spied on in that out-of-the-world place.

But the good priest Hermann silenced all these conjectures and rumours when they came to his ears, declaring that it was uncharitable and unchristian to speak evil of a stranger merely because his countenance was not pleasing. Accordingly, Bertolf was welcomed by Father Hermann, and invited to join his little flock. The stranger willingly accepted this offer, and it was soon remarked that no one was more devout at church, or a more strict observer of all fasts and ordinances, than was Bertolf.

After a time he took the post of schoolmaster; and,

as he had some skill in physic, he also acted as doctor, not, however, without being well fee'd for his time and learning.

He had been there some six months before he met Rudolph face to face. When the latter saw him, looked on his dark face, and heard his low voice, a faint memory—an indistinct idea that he had met him before—had seen him years ago—crossed his mind. But the name was unfamiliar, and he could not recal the features, so he gave it up as a phantasy, and thought no more of it.

As for Bertolf, on his first meeting with Rudolph of Monte Corro, he surveyed him from head to foot with stealthy cat-like glance, taking care that he did not perceive his earnest gaze. Whether he knew him, or thought he knew him, he gave no evidence, and the course of events at the village went on much as usual.

But at the close of the sixth year of Rudolph's residence there, an event happened which produced a marvellous change in the relations of the different characters of our story one with the other.

CHAPTER III.

THE JEWISH WANDERERS.

It was at the close of harvest time, and the worthy Hermann had chosen a saint day from the calendar for particular observance as a thanksgiving for the successful gathering in of the produce of the soil.

The villagers as they emerged from the little church one by one, waited outside to receive the parting benediction of Father Hermann, and whilst so doing chatted among themselves.

While they were so doing, there arrived a man who had been tending cattle in one of the mountain valleys, and who brought news that a tribe of wandering Jews was in the neighbourhood. This excited a great commotion among the villagers, for the very name of Jew was held in the utmost horror and detestation.

"Jews!" cried one; "what want the accursed ones in our happy valley? Away with them!"

"Jews! What do they here?"

"Ay, what do they here?" asked Bertolf. "You may well ask, my friends. They come to rob and plunder, to steal our fowls, our cattle, perchance our children."

Here ensued a loud outcry from the women, and

several hurried off to see that their offspring were secure.

"Let us drive them from our valleys—the accursed heathen," cried Bertolf; "they pollute the very air we breathe."

"Ay—let us drive them off," shouted the villagers in chorus. "Away with them!"

"What means all this commotion?" asked Father Hermann, as he came out from the church. "Are ye all going mad?"

"Not mad, holy Father," said Bertolf, oringingly, "but only sorely scandalized, for we have just heard that a tribe of wandering Jews are in the neighbourhood. The people cry to drive them away."

"Nay, nay, good schoolmaster, be not so intolerant," said the good priest. "What though they be Jews, shall we persecute yet more this persecuted race? Let them be; doubtless they have only encamped near us on their journey, and will depart again."

"But suppose they do not depart," said Bertolf, in sinister tones. "Supposing the infidel dogs design to take up their abode here. It must be seen to, good father; it must be seen to."

"I will see to it," said Rudolph of Monte Corro, who had heard the latter part of the conversation. "I am going up into the mountain valleys, and will discover and question these people as to their intentions. There is no need for persecution or cruelty. It would ill become us as Christians, and yet we cannot allow Jews to settle among us."

"Hear to Rudolph—he speaks well," cried several of the villagers.

"Ay, hear to him," echoed Bertolf; "he speaks well, indeed. We will have no Jews settle among us."

"Rudolph," said the magistrate Lorenz, who now appeared on the scene, and was briefly informed of the subject of conversation, "I, as magistrate, leave this matter in your hands, and in full confidence in your judgment and goodness, depute you to see these people and do with them as you please."

"Ay, ay," cried all; "leave it to the noble Rudolph."

"Oh, Rudolph," said the gentle Madelina, clinging to his arm, "be not harsh with these poor people. Remember, if they are sinful and unbelievers, they have suffered much. Have pity on them."

"Pity!" cried Bertolf the schoolmaster, angrily. "Pity on Jews! the accursed race who crucified our Blessed Saviour. Accursed be they—accursed!"

"Curse not," said Father Hermann, holding up his hand. "Remember that our Saviour on the cross prayed to God to forgive them; and surely we, with such an example, may have a little mercy. You are too intolerant and cruel, schoolmaster."

"'Tis my zeal for our holy faith," replied Bertolf, laying his hand on his heart, and bending in obsequious humility.

CHAPTER IV.

LEAH AND RUDOLPH MEET AGAIN.

RUDOLPH was in the habit of strolling about the mountains and forest at their foot with gun over his shoulder, in search of game. On this occasion he wandered on till evening without seeing any trace of the tribe of Jews. The sun was just setting behind the great hills to the west, when his attention was attracted by the smoke of a fire on the borders of the forest. Hither he bent his steps, and in the deepening gloom could soon make out the red flame of a camp fire. As he approached, he saw that it was outside an old ruined and deserted shepherd's or huntsman's hut. By the side of the fire stood a female figure. He advanced cautiously, and the woman, who appeared to be wrapt in thought, did not notice him. Coming up in a direction from the rear of the hut, he advanced quite close without her being conscious of his presence. At a little distance off, farther in the forest, he could distinguish a few tents; and judged rightly that this was the Jew's encampment.

But it was not the tents which riveted his gaze, but the female figure by the fire. It was that of a *finely-formed* young woman of some twenty or twenty-one years of age. Her features were grand in their

chaste simplicity, faultless in outline, while the deadly pallor of her face, and the sad, dreamy look in her large dark eyes, enhanced her singular, her fascinating beauty. One glance was sufficient to tell him that he saw a daughter of Judah. He advanced towards her, a light flush of recognition on his cheek.

"Leah!" he said, "we have met again."

A slight cry broke from the girl; but she instantly regained her self-possession, and looked at the speaker. Like a flash the memory of his face, voice, and figure came to her. Her pale cheek flushed up for a moment, and then its pallor grew deeper than before.

"We have met again, Christian," she said, in slow, mournful accents of singular sweetness; "we have met again. I hoped we might, and yet prayed that we might not!" Then she paused, and as if by a sudden impulse, asked—"What would you with me?"

"I live in yonder village," he said; "the inhabitants have deputed me to learn the intentions of your tribe, for they like not Jews staying in the neighbourhood."

"So," said the Jewish maiden, in accents of bitter scorn, "so!—your errand is one of persecution—to drive the hated Jews from your vicinity, lest they should pollute the very air you breathe! Noble Christian!"

Her dark eyes flashed and swept over his form angrily.

"Nay, Leah,—such is not my purpose——"

"What, then, is your purpose?"

"To learn your intentions."

"We are weary. We have travelled far, and en-

dured much misery and hardship. We need rest—the blind old man, my father, can travel no farther. Go, tell your people that the accursed Jews need rest, and will stop here in the free forest, breathing the free air which God gives to Jew and Christian alike, till the merciful Christians shall drive them on with stones and curses! Christian—begone!”

There was a depth of passion—a sublimity of scorn—in the Jewish girl’s words; and her eyes shone with a fierce light, as she bade him go.

Rudolph, awed by her grand manner, did not venture to address her again, but returned to the village, feeling that there was some cause, some excuse for the bitter scorn and pity with which she spoke of his people.

Leah remained standing after he had left her, and her lips moved for a time, as if in prayer. Then she produced some papers from her bosom and looked at them.

“We have met again!” she muttered, “and he has warned me—me, the daughter of a persecuted race,—to leave his neighbourhood. These papers—he knows not that the despised Jewess holds that which would give him the estates of his family. The Christian!—curse—no, I will not curse him! How sad, mournful he looked—how different from the dashing cavalier I knew six years ago. And yet how handsome; and me thinks, too, there was some pity in his eyes for the poor Jewess! Away with the thought!—he is a Christian, and has nought for me and mine but curses and execrations.”

She replaced the papers in her bosom.

"Nevertheless," she thought, "I will give him the papers—ay, even though his people stone me!"

Rudolph returned to the village, and, in answer to inquiries, said that the tribe of Jews had only halted to rest, and would soon proceed on their journey.

But he called a trusty servant, and packing a large basket with provisions and wine, bade him take it to the ruined hut and give it to the maiden, whom he described, at the same time enjoining secrecy.

When Leah received the basket her heart softened, and she regretted her bitter words and thoughts. There was a note also in the basket, in which Rudolph bade her take heart, and stay with her people so long as she pleased, for that he was a man of note in the village, and would see that they were not molested.

"Christian though he be," thought Leah, "at least he has some pity for the poor Jewess and her people!"

Rudolph, on his return to the village, asserted that the tribe of Jews would leave the neighbourhood. For a time Bertolf, the schoolmaster, appeared satisfied; but, as time passed on, rumours were current that a Jewish woman had been seen hovering on the outskirts of the village. Rudolph, too, now began to make frequent absences, and the gentle Madelina seemed to have lost her power over him.

Bertolf noticed all this with uneasiness and suspicion, and constantly harped on the Jew tribe, which he declared still hovered about the village. His pious

horror of the accursed race was his ostensible reason; but there were those, and among them the good Father Hermann, who suspected that some other and deeper motive must be at the bottom of the schoolmaster's determined hostility and ill-concealed uneasiness at the neighbourhood of the wanderers.

CHAPTER V.

LEAH IS SAVED BY FATHER HERMANN FROM THE FURY
OF THE VILLAGERS.

"MADELINA," said Rudolph, on one Sunday morning, "I know your gentle kind heart, and feel sure that you will aid me in a work of charity."

"Oh, Rudolph! can you doubt it? Say what it is, and fear not that Madelina will refuse to aid you."

There was some little embarrassment in his tone as he proceeded to explain.

"You know, Madelina," he said, "that for some time past there has been a party of poor, outcast, wandering Jews on the borders of the forest."

"Yes, yes, Rudolph; but I thought you had seen them, and that they had left, or were about to do so."

"They have done so, except three—an old man, a woman, and a girl. The old man is blind, and the poor woman is taken ill; and both have for their sole hope and support the young girl. Hers is a cruel fate—alone in the dreary forest, dragging on a miserable existence in a ruined hut—with no voice to cheer her, no hand to offer her aid and comfort."

"Nay, Rudolph, say not so," cried Madelina; "we will send the poor outcasts food, medicine, and wine. I will see to it at once."

"I fear, Madelina, that these poor people must have more effective aid to keep them from perishing. Daily I have seen that they received food, and such comfort as lay in my power."

"Ah, Rudolph, yours is indeed a noble heart!" said Madelina, gazing in his face with love and admiration beaming from her soft eyes.

"But that is not sufficient, Madelina. The old hut is no place for a sick woman, a blind old man, and a delicate girl. The nights are cold, and the storms and rain which now sweep down from the mountains render the hut unfit for human beings."

"What can we do, Rudolph?"

"Madelina, your father is rich; he will refuse you nothing. I wish to provide these poor outcasts a shelter in the village. He has two unoccupied houses; beg him to let the poor wanderers have one to inhabit until the woman has recovered from her illness, and all have rested."

Madelina heard this proposal with feelings approaching to dismay. The prejudice against Jews was powerful—the hostility of the country people bitter. A Jewish family in their village!—Madelina recoiled aghast from the idea. But noticing Rudolph's pained, sorrowful look at her hesitation, her scruples gave way.

"But, Rudolph, what will the people say if my father, their magistrate, should shelter Jews?" she urged, timidly.

"What can they say, except that the worthy *Lorenz* has given a fresh proof of his benevolence

and kindness of heart? Myself, Madelina, would willingly shelter the outcasts, but the Jewish girl, Leah, positively refused to accept my hospitality."

"Rudolph, it shall be as you wish. You are so good, so kind, so wise, that I feel in yielding to you I cannot be wrong."

"Thanks, dear Madelina—a thousand thanks. I knew your kind heart too well to fear a refusal. When will you speak to your father?"

"This very day, after church."

"Good. Now adieu, Madelina; I must be away."

"What, Rudolph, are you not going to church?" she asked, in dismay.

"Not to-day, my child. I have business in the hills."

"Rudolph, this is the second Sunday you have missed hearing the good words of Father Hermann."

"It is unavoidable, Madelina. An errand of mercy may always be held sufficient excuse for absence from church."

Then Rudolph hurried off; while Madelina, not without sorrowful thoughts and misgivings, proceeded to attire herself for mass.

The service over, the villagers remained outside the sacred building till Father Hermann should come forth and give them his blessing.

Madelina took the opportunity to redeem her promise; and while her father was in conversation with the good priest, proceeded to urge her request.

"Granted, my good girl, granted," said Lorenz, playfully patting her cheek, "before asked, for I know

that any request coming from Madelina can but be good and worthy."

"Father, I have to beg shelter for a poor sick woman, a blind old man, and a young girl, who are in dire need."

"Certainly, my child, certainly; you have my permission to do as you please. What say you, good father?"

"I say with you, worthy friend, that the request is a laudable and Christian one, and does Madelina honour."

Bertolf, the schoolmaster, who had been listening, and creeping nearer, now asked—

"Who are these unfortunates whom we are to shelter in our village?"

"They belong to the tribe of poor Jews, and have been forced to remain behind their brethren by sickness."

"Jews! — Jews!" cried Bertolf, throwing up his hands in pious horror. "Can I believe my ears? is it, indeed, a Christian maiden who asks shelter for Jews?"

"Methinks," said Father Hermann, "'tis a Christian and a meritorious wish on the part of Madelina. If these poor people are Jews, they are yet our fellow-creatures."

"Incredible! the world is coming to an end, when such words come from the mouth of a Christian minister. Father Hermann, you *dare* not preach thus from your pulpit."

"Peace! uncharitable man," replied the priest.

"What say you, my friends, shall we refuse shelter to these poor outcasts on account of their creed?"

But so strong was the prejudice against the children of Judah among Father Hermann's flock, that even his known piety, and the love and respect they bore him, could not conquer the feeling. Bertolf was busy, too, sowing words of doubt and warning among them.

"It is more than a hundred years," said the school-master, "since the accursed race were driven from this province. In heretical Prussia and Sweden the Jews are branded with red-hot iron wherever found ; and shall we, in this village, the centre of enlightenment, put up with more than the Lutherans ? Listen to me, friends. There was lately seen hovering about the village a Jewish woman, well favoured and handsome, but nevertheless a witch. Then we read that, years ago, the Jews poisoned the wells and bewitched the cattle. Shall we suffer them to do so again ?"

"No, no," was shouted on all hands.

"Even now, friends, the Jewish sorceress is hovering about the village. I, myself, have seen her. Shall we suffer it ?"

"No, no, no ; away with the Jews."

"Let us drive her forth, my friends, before she works us evil."

"Aye, aye ; let us drive her forth."

"Stone her ! Drown her !" shouted Bertolf.
"T'would be a righteous deed."

By these and other words he worked up the excitable people to a pitch of fanatical frenzy, which all the eloquence of Father Hermann could not counteract.

It was while inflamed by Bertolf's words the vil-

lagers were shouting curses and threats on the head of the Jewish sorceress, that word was brought by a boy that she was at that very moment in the neighbourhood.

"Down with her! Stone her! Drive her forth!" shouted the implacable Bertolf. "In the name of our holy faith, let us pursue this wicked sorceress."

Then the schoolmaster himself led the way, and, followed by the infuriated people, hastened in the direction where she had been seen. Threats and curses rent the air, sticks were brandished and stones procured, and notwithstanding alike the prayers and commands of the priest, the mob hurried off to wreak their vengeance on the unfortunate Jewess.

Father Hermann remained behind in conversation with Lorenz and Madelina.

"The words of the malicious Bertolf have influenced the people to fury," he said. "It must be my task to undo the mischief he has wrought. I cannot comprehend his bitter hatred for this unhappy race. One would almost fancy he had some special hatred for this old man, woman, and girl. But the other day, one of the shepherds, who had often seen the tribe in the mountains, mentioned in his hearing that they came from Frankfort-on-the-Maine. Lorenz, my friend, I verily thought the schoolmaster would have fainted. He turned absolutely livid, and his frame trembled as though with some powerful emotion, fear, or hate. Can it be that he knows this tribe?"

"Who can say, good father? Bertolf is a man who keeps his own counsel. None knows who or what he was before he came here. He has been noted for

the strictness with which he attends to all religious ordinances, and the bitterness with which he condemns others. I like not his disposition."

While they were thus talking, a loud outcry proclaimed that something was about to happen, and in the course of a few moments they saw running towards them the figure of a female, closely pursued by an infuriated crowd.

"The Jewess!" cried Father Hermann. "It is providential she comes this way. I will protect her."

Then the good priest advanced to meet her. Leah, the Jewish maiden, pale and trembling, ran up to the good man, whose benevolent aspect and grey hairs seemed to hold out hopes of protection.

"Save me, good sir; save me! These people pursue me, and pelt me with stones. God of my fathers, what crime have I committed?"

Father Hermann advanced between her and her enemies, and waved them back.

"Back, cruel, wicked men, and dare not attempt violence to this poor girl."

But, flushed with excitement, the fanatics pressed on, and scarce heeding the priest, some of them attempted to seize her.

Leah, so soon as she felt their touch upon her, turned angrily on them; her dark eyes flashing, her hair falling in wild profusion over her bare neck and shoulders.

"I am here," she said, in undaunted tones. "What want ye with me?"

"Stone her! Stone her! A sorceress! Away with her!"

These and many other threatening cries were her answer, and despite the priest, it seemed that they were about to tear her away by force.

"Back, men of violence and blood, nor dare to lay a hand on the woman."

Then, turning to Leah, he placed his hands upon her head.

"Daughter of Judah! I lay my anointed hand upon thee—I am thy protector!"

The crowd were for a moment awed by the fierce demeanour and threats of their priest. Seeing this, Bertolf determined on yet farther stirring up their anger.

"Heed not the priest," he said; "he is half a heretic himself. Know you what this woman is lurking about for? This is the eve of one of the Jewish feasts, in which they sacrifice a little child. This woman is lurking about in order to procure a victim!"

A great shout of execration and horror greeted these words.

"Malicious fiend!" cried Father Hermann, "if aught happens to this woman, her blood be on thy head!—I hold thee responsible."

"I can put up with even that," said Bertolf, obsequiously, laying his hand on his heart with meek humility, "in the cause of our holy faith!"

Now again, with cries and shouts, the crowd press on to seize their prey. Several hands are laid on her, and more than one blow aimed as she kneels shrinking in fear by the side of Father Hermann. But just at this moment, and when her case seems desperate, the

priest produces the cross he wears at his girdle, and, holding it over her head, addresses her enemies—

“Down, impious dogs! down on your knees before the symbol of our holy faith! Kneel, miserable sinners!—or, in the name of our Lord, whose emblem this is, I will curse thee!”

Then, as if by magic, all shrank back; and as their eyes fell on the cross, they one by one dropped on their knees and uncovered their heads. Bertolf himself dared no longer refuse obedience, and for the present the Jewish maiden was saved from the fate which seemed to await her.

It was a grand and striking *tableau*—the dark-eyed daughter of Judah kneeling at the feet of the Christian priest, who holds above her head the cross before which her persecutors fall on their knees in pious terror!

The look of horror with which the Jewish girl gazes on the Christian emblem to which she is compelled to owe her safety, was inimitable. The deathly pallor of her face enhanced her singular beauty, and made her dark eyes blaze with greater splendour. It was a subject for a painter—her attitude, her disordered attire, her look of terror and horror mingled—made up a picture striking and terrible.

CHAPTER VI.

LEAH IN THE FOREST.

RUDOLPH knew nothing of the danger which the Jewish maiden had escaped until his return in the evening, and then it was Madelina who informed him.

"A curse on the cowardly dogs!" he cried, indignantly, "would that I had been there—my arm should have been around her, my sword should have protected her."

Then Rudolph, to the great dismay of Madelina, hastily took his leave, declaring that he must seek the unfortunates and see they were secure from further harm. Poor Madelina wept plentifully, for now the cruel conviction was being brought home to her mind that Rudolph loved her not, but that this Jewish girl had robbed her of all share in his heart.

Madelina was still weeping when Lorenz and Father Hermann entered and found her. In reply to her father's questioning she could make but little answer; but the good priest, gifted with more penetration, at once perceived how the land lay.

"I fear much, friend Lorenz," he said, when Madelina had retired, "that Rudolph has been fascinated by the charms of this savage beauty—this handsome Jewish girl!"

"But I thought he was pledged to my Madelina," said the worthy magistrate, "and I know the poor child loves him."

"I fear so, too."

"Fear!—nay, say not so. Since he has been with us he has been all that we could wish until—until——"

"Until the coming of those wandering Jews. "I have noticed the change for some time past, but till to-day had been at a loss for the cause. Nevertheless, let us hope for the best—that he will recover from his infatuation, and be again the kind and courteous friend and honourable man we have always found him."

The magistrate and Father Hermann talked long and earnestly on the subject; and even the benevolent Father Hermann, who had given the Jewish girl such effectual aid in the time of her extremity, felt inclined to regret that they had ever come to the neighbourhood, to disturb the primitive tranquillity of their little society.

But let us now leave the Styrian village and wander up into the gloomy recesses of the great forests which skirt the mountain's foot.

* * * * *

Seated at the foot of a stone cross, erected to commemorate some departed soul—deep in the solitude of the forest, dimly lighted by the pale gleam of the moon struggling through the thick overhanging branches,—behold the Jewish maiden, Leah, sitting alone, disconsolate, like the daughters of Israel of old, "by the waters of Babylon," leaning her head on her hand.

She is soliloquizing. Let us listen to the burning thoughts which find expression in murmured words—

“Will he come? Yes, surely he will come. I feel—I know it. What madness is this which possesses me? It is the old fiend within me, which I thought I had crushed years ago. Whence comes this wild passion? Why am I, a daughter of Israel, compelled to bend in spirit, and own to this Christian that I love him—*I love him!—love him?* The words are always on my lips—in my heart. The very trees of the forest, the rippling brooks, babble the same words. Is there no escape? Can I not fly from my destiny? Alas! no. When I leave the spot where he is I leave my life behind me. What mysterious power is it which urges me to leave the forest, the old man, my father, and Ruth, to hover about the Christian village? A while ago our relentless persecutors would have taken my life. Witch and sorceress they called me. Alas! it is I who am bewitched. These papers I have kept so long in my bosom, they will give him the estates of his fathers, and yet, coward that I am, I dare not give them to him lest he should fly and leave me. *No! No! No!* I cannot. All, all will I forsake for him—my people—the faith of my ancestors. These papers shall be my marriage portion—for has he not sworn that he loves me? *He loves me! He loves me!* There is sweet music in the words. Hark! a footstep! 'Tis his! He comes!”

Then Leah arose and advanced eagerly to meet the new-comer, and in a few moments was clasped in the embrace of Rudolph.

“Leah, my Leah, you have been in peril. They

have threatened and frightened you—accursed wretches that they are.”

“Say no more, Rudolph. The night is gone, and now in your presence I feel the light of day; the glorious sun of your love beams upon me, and past troubles, past dangers, are forgotten.”

“Leah, let us leave this place, now that they have dared to threaten and endanger you, fierce hatred burns in my breast for all these people—Lorenz, Madelina, all are forgotten. What say you, queen of my heart? Shall we fly from this place to a far-off land where Jew and Christian dwell together in peace? Come, I will leave all and take my fortune with you.”

“But the blind old man, my father? What will be his fate, deprived of Leah, his only stay, his only hope?”

“I will see that he has money to take him on. God will provide for him.”

“Rudolph, my heart recoils in horror at the thought. And yet so fiercely burns the flame of love, that I cannot refuse. God, who provided for his prophet by the birds of the air, will guide the old man’s steps and protect him. Rudolph, I am yours, your servant, your handmaiden. Command, and I obey.”

“Leah, my Leah, you consent?” he cried, rapturously; “then, indeed, I am happy. No time shall be lost. I will at once make arrangements, and we will fly together.”

“And you do not scorn the Jewish maiden—daughter of a despised race—a dowerless outcast?” she asked, rapturously.

"Not dowerless—your glorious beauty, Leah, is dower enough for me. Your priceless love shall be your marriage portion."

"Rudolph, it is yours—yours alone—yours though emperors knelt at my feet and proffered their crowns, their thrones."

While they thus talked, they were too much wrapt up in themselves to notice a figure skulking in the shade of the forest, and closely observing their motions.

Presently Rudolph commenced to question her as to the particulars of the furious onslaught of the villagers.

"But there was one man, Rudolph, whose visage inspired me with an unaccountable aversion, and whose very voice seemed to be familiar to me. They called him Bertolf, the schoolmaster. He was the bitterest of my enemies, and continually cried, 'Stone her! Stone her!' Who and what is he? and why this fierce rancour against me who never harmed him?"

"I know not who he is, or whence he comes, Leah, but like you, when my eyes first fell on his countenance, a feeling of dislike and mistrust took possession of me, and with it a vague memory of having seen him before. When he spoke, too, I fancied that though not familiar, the accents of his voice were not entirely strange. All that I know of him is this, that he came to the village some three years ago, purchased and paid for a small dwelling, and shortly after was appointed schoolmaster. He is marvellously strict in all religious observances; but beyond what I have told you no one knows any-

thing of him. There is evil in the man, of that I feel assured ; and were I going to remain in the village he should feel my vengeance for his brutality to you."

"Nay, nay, Rudolph, think no more of it. I am safe now ; and with your love to brighten my life, have no thought of vengeance."

"And now, Leah, I must bid you farewell till the morrow. I will make all arrangements, and then we will leave this intolerant land together, and be happy in each other's love."

Rudolph tenderly embraced her, and turned to go, but she called him back.

"Rudolph, a bitter pang, a dreadful foreboding shot through my heart. It was this—that you might prove unfaithful."

"Never, Leah—never. I swear to be true to you—to you alone, my only love. Fear not ; no earthly power can unbind the fetters you have wound round my heart."

"Rudolph," she said, in solemn tones ; "I must believe you ; and yet there is a dreadful chill at my heart. My love for you is my life—I *will not be forsaken !*"

He reassured her in a few words, again embraced her, and then left for the village.

She reseated herself by the broken cross, and again gave vent to her thoughts in murmured words—

"At least I shall not come to him as a dowerless bride ; these papers will put him in possession of wealth and estates ; and should he ever tire of me, should his love ever wane, the memory that Leah, the

Jewish outcast, came to his arms no portionless bride, may recal his truant love."

Suddenly her eyes fell on the cross at the foot of which she was seated—again the same look of horror and hatred flashed over her face as when the priest Hermann held it above her head.

"Emblem of the Christian faith," she said, apostrophizing it;—"thy disciples vaunt thee as the symbol of mercy, charity, and good-will towards men. False! false! thou art the emblem of bitter persecution—relentless hate—savage tyranny—of vengeance untempered by justice—cruelty without mercy. A curse——"

Here she suddenly arrested herself.

"No, no; I will not curse. Thy image, Rudolph, seems to stand before me, and turn my curses into blessings. I must go back to my old father and Ruth."

Scarcely had she left than a figure, which had been skulking behind the trees, advanced to the cross. It was that of Bertolf, who had followed Rudolph from the village, and heard and seen all.

"So, so," he said. "Now I have thee, accursed Jewess, although to-day my designs were frustrated by that babbling priest. Did she recognise me? I fancied that when her eyes first fell on my face she penetrated through my disguise. But no, it could not be, or she would have denounced me. Now I will denounce her, for did I not hear her blaspheme and curse the holy cross? And yet 'twere better to manage *this matter quietly*. They must be driven from the neighbourhood. I will cast about me for a plan. If

they are permitted to settle here others will follow their example ; and assuredly I shall be discovered—and discovery means disgrace, perhaps death. It is fortunate old Abraham is blind, or otherwise, should he meet me, no beard, no disguise could avail. They must be driven away, or I am ruined. First I will try some stratagem ; then, failing that, I will again denounce her, and work up the passions of these ignorant people. I must go on now ; to hesitate were ruin. Self-preservation is the first law of nature.”

CHAPTER VII.

BERTOLF IS DESPATCHED TO OFFER LEAH A
PURSE OF GOLD.

WHEN Rudolph next met the father of Madelina, a painful scene took place. The old man, moved to anger by Madelina's silent grief, accused him of his perfidy, and challenged him with being infatuated with the Jewish witch. Rudolph boldly avowed his love, and declared that he was not amenable for the feelings of his heart. Father Hermann, who was present, in vain pointed out the wickedness in bestowing his affections on the daughter of a race who deny our Saviour.

"Good magistrate and priest, 'tis in vain to urge me," he said. "My mind is made up, my honour pledged. I love the girl, and she loves me to distraction ; for me she only lives, and were I to desert her the maiden would die. No earthly power shall make me give up Leah."

"Rudolph," said the priest, holding up his hand in solemn warning, "pause and consider ere it be too late. Have you no thought of the duty you owe to others? Have you no thought of Madelina, whose gentle heart you have won? Have you no thought *that she will die if you desert her?*"

Rudolph seemed much moved at these words, and at that moment Madelina entered the room.

"See, cruel man, see the poor child's pale face and tearful eyes. Look on her, and then say that you will desert her and break her gentle heart for the sake of a Jewish heretic."

"Rudolph," said Madelina, with clasped hands, "is it true that you no longer love me?"

"Madelina, you wring my heart; but I cannot lie to you. It is not that I love you less, but that I love Leah more."

"Alas! he is bewitched by this wild, savage beauty," cried the priest.

"Rudolph," said Madelina, "let it be so. Your happiness is my sole thought; for if you love this Jewish maiden more than me, take her, and may my blessing and the blessing of God go with you. At least let me be your friend."

Tears flowed down the young girl's face as she thus magnanimously relinquished her love. Rudolph also was deeply affected, and, seizing her hand, knelt at her feet and kissed it.

"Madelina, you are an angel of goodness. A friend, my dear friend, you shall ever be."

Then, unable to prolong the painful scene, he bowed to Lorenz and the priest, and hurried away.

Madelina also retired to her chamber, and Lorenz and Father Hermann were left together. They had not been so long when Bertolf, the schoolmaster, entered.

"Good morrow, worthy magistrate. Good morrow, Father Hermann," he said, removing his hat, and

bowing with cringing servility. "Let me hope that, if in my zeal for our holy faith I offended your reverence, I may be forgiven."

"It is granted," said the priest, giving him his hand. "It is not in the nature of my disposition nor my office to bear malice."

"Shall we consult the schoolmaster concerning this trouble?" asked Lorenz, in a low voice, of the priest.

"Why not?" was the reply.

Lorenz beckoned the schoolmaster towards his chair, and the three remained in earnest converse for several minutes.

"The schoolmaster is right—it is well worth trying," said the priest. "What say you, good Lorenz?"

"I agree with you, Father Hermann; I agree with you, and rejoice in the hope it holds out, that Rudolph's eyes may be opened, my poor Madelina yet be happy."

"Let us send for Rudolph."

"Aye, we will send for him. I doubt not, in his infatuation for this sorceress, he will consent to the trial."

Accordingly, a messenger was sent, and Rudolph quickly appeared.

"Rudolph," said the priest, who it was agreed should be spokesman, "I well know your honourable nature, and regret the more that you should have been enchanted by this heretical syren. You know, my friend, that she belongs to a race above all others eager in their avarice for gold. A suspicion arises in my mind that this is a deliberate scheme to entrap you."

"Entrap me!—how? I do not understand."

"It is simple enough, good sir," said Bertolf, taking up the speech. "Can you not understand that, to a wandering tribe of Jews, such a girl as this must be a mine of wealth? It is probable that you are not the first well-to-do gentleman whom she has ensnared. The worthy magistrate proposes, therefore, and Father Hermann approves of the proposal, that a purse of gold be sent to this Jewish girl, on condition of her leaving the neighbourhood for ever. Doubtless she will accept it, and then you will be convinced of how mercenary was her love."

"Offer gold to Leah!" cried Rudolph, scornfully; "'twere an insult—she would spurn the wealth of the Indies. You know her not, good priest; you know not her tender, loving heart—her deep, passionate nature!"

"Nevertheless, will you consent that the trial be made?"

"Consent, good Lorenz? Assuredly I will, were it but to convince you how deeply you have wronged her, Jewess though she be. Aye, try her with gold—then shall you discover her sterling worth, her deep love for me. I know that to you, my friends, my conduct must seem strange; and to Madelina I own my heart has compelled me to play false. Therefore, if Leah consents to take gold on condition of resigning her love, I will consent to tear her from my heart,—and since the poor child loves me, will do my best to make Madelina happy."

"Bravo!" cried the worthy magistrate. "Rudolph, you speak bravely, and something tells me that you will yet be undeceived, and my dear child be happy."

You know, Rudolph, the respect which all bear to you in this village, and that Madelina will be no dowerless bride ; so prepare to tear the image of this Jewish witch from your mind, and before many days are over we will have a merry wedding, I'll be bound."

"Good Lorenz!" said Rudolph, sadly, "it cannot be. My darling Leah will indignantly spurn the gold, and I shall redeem my faith with her."

"We shall see, we shall see!" cried the magistrate, joyfully. "I have a presentiment that all will yet go well. Now, schoolmaster, will you undertake this business?"

"Willingly, worthy sir," he replied, again bowing.

"Here, then, is a purse of gold. Go up to the mountain—to the hut where I am told these people have taken up their abode—and offer the maiden Leah this purse of gold, on condition of her at once and for ever leaving this neighbourhood and province."

"I will do so, worthy sir."

"And should she consent, all our trouble will be at an end."

"But she will not consent. See here, Bertolf, take with you a messenger, and the instant that she has scornfully refused the proffered gold, despatch him to the village with the tidings."

"Trust me, good sir, trust me. I will take witnesses and a messenger with me."

"Hasten on your errand, good Bertolf," said Lorenz, rubbing his hands gleefully. "I already foresee the result."

"I will make all haste. Trust me, good friends—trust me."

There was a something which resembled, Rudolph thought, a covert sneer in the man's voice as he disappeared with these final words.

"I like not that fellow, and feel half sorry he is entrusted with the mission," thought Rudolph. "No matter; Leah will refuse with such scornful anger that there can be no misunderstanding; and he dare not harm her."

"You will remain with us to hear the result, Rudolph?" asked Lorenz.

"I will remain till she sends back her indignant refusal; and then, borne on the wings of love, I will seek my Jewish love."

CHAPTER VIII.

BERTOLF IS DISCOVERED AND DENOUNCED BY ABRAHAM
AS "NATHAN THE JEW"—MURDER.

LET us follow Bertolf, who, with one or two of the villagers, at once set out for the forest with the purse of gold. It was a dark and windy afternoon, and heavy black clouds seemed to threaten a storm. But not heeding the weather, the big rain-drops which now began to fall, nor the distant rumbling of the thunder over the mountains, the schoolmaster hastened on, and soon arrived outside the hut where the Jewish outcasts had taken refuge.

The spot was a wild and desolate one, and the hut so dilapidated as to make it unfit for human habitation. Nevertheless, this was the only shelter the Jewish outcasts could find in a Christian land. The angry sky now grew more overcast, the rumbling of the thunder nearer and louder, and the rain began to fall fast, and the wind to whistle and roar dismally among the huge forest trees. The scene and the accessories were such as might strike terror to the timid, and should inspire even the bold with awe.

"Stay without here, my friends," said Bertolf to those who had accompanied him; "we shall alarm

them if we enter all together, and that is not our object."

Accordingly, they waited without while the school-master entered with the purse of gold.

The interior of the hut was dark and gloomy, being lighted only by dim rays which penetrated through holes in the roof. He looked around, and seeing no one, called out—

"Hillo, there ! Jews, where are you ? Come forth and answer for yourselves."

A faint noise from one corner attracted his attention ; and he now perceived that a portion of the hut was partitioned off.

"Come forth, Jews," he again shouted, advancing to this side.

Then there appeared the form of an old woman scarce able to walk from weakness.

"What would you with us, good sir ?" she asked.

"What would I ? I will tell you anon," he replied, harshly. "Where are the others of your accursed brood—the old man and the girl Leah ?"

"The old man is yonder," she said, pointing to the screen ; "and Leah, she has gone forth to seek food and water for us."

"Now look you here, Jewess ; you must all depart from this at once, nor dare to delay. I have come from the authorities of the village to warn you off under penalty of death."

"Oh, sir, have you no pity ?—no mercy ? I am too weak to travel—at least, to walk, and we have no money to pay for a conveyance. Have you no pity ?"

"You must go, I tell you, woman ; but I am not altogether without pity. If I give you gold, will you at once leave, all of you ?"

"Oh, yes, sir, gladly ; it is our desire. We are endeavouring to reach Bohemia, where we have friends."

"Ha ! good ; see, here is a purse of gold. If you will engage to leave at once it shall be yours."

"Yes, good sir, we will go—go at once—to-morrow."

"You will answer for the girl Leah, that she also will go, and engage never to return ?"

"I will answer for Leah."

"Good. Here is the gold. Now, mark me——"

"Whose voice is that ? I know that voice—that voice ;" and Bertolf, turning, saw the tottering form of a grey-headed old man groping towards him along the wall.

"'Tis old Abraham, sir ; he is blind."

"See that you leave at once, without fail," continued Bertolf, preparing to leave himself, for he did not care to encounter the old man.

But Abraham had now groped his way to them, and seized hold of Bertolf by the cloak.

"Again that voice—I know that voice."

"Unhand me, old fool," cried Bertolf, angrily.

"No, no. I know thee, thou miserable sinner ! Ruth ! Leah ! 'tis Nathan the apostate !—Nathan, who renounced the creed of his fathers to save himself from the consequences of his crimes !"

"Silence, old dotard !" hissed Bertolf between his teeth—"silence !"

At that moment one of the villagers opened the door of the hut.

"Good schoolmaster, shall you be long? It is beginning to rain."

"No, no; I shall join you directly." Then he muttered to himself, "Perdition seize it! They will hear the old man's babbling, and I shall be discovered."

"Yes, I know thee," continued old Abraham—"robber! murderer! villain!" His voice rose to a scream, and he clutched him yet tighter by the cloak. "Nathan, the apostate! Nathan Mira, the Jew!"

Quick as thought the schoolmaster seized the old man by the throat. There was a brief struggle—a few gurgling gasps. His face grew livid, his eyes distended, and with a deep groan the old man fell back—*dead!*

Almost at the same moment there was a flash—a tremendous peal of thunder, and a shock which made the earth tremble. A thunderbolt had fallen and struck a part of the hut.

"Dead! dead!" cried Nathan, horror-stricken, in spite of his hardihood.

The old woman had fainted.

The villagers, alarmed by the sound of the struggles, the cry of Abraham, and the thunderbolt, rushed in. They had heard the last words of the schoolmaster.

"What, dead!" they echoed, gazing on the lifeless form of the old man.

"Yes," said Bertolf, with blasphemous hypocrisy—"dead by the hand of Heaven! The judgment of God has overtaken the old Jew, and his thunderbolt has

stricken him down. Go, my friends," said Nathan, the Jew ; "return to the village, and inform the worthy magistrate that Leah has accepted the money and will depart at once."

* * * * *

Nathan Mira, the apostate Jew, went forth from the hut into the gloomy forest. The last moanings of the storm were dying away, and all was silent as the grave. He went some little distance from the hut, and then halted. With haggard looks he glanced around as though fearing the ghost of the murdered old man.

"I did it in self-preservation," he muttered. "The old fool brought it on himself. His prating tongue would have betrayed me.—*Did they hear him?* No; there was nought but stupid wonder and awe in their glance as they gazed on the dead body. They had no suspicion. And now I must go on; to hesitate is ruin. This woman and the girl Leah *must be driven forth*, or I am lost. I must contrive to poison the mind of Rudolph, so that he may refuse even to hear her. The old woman heard Abraham's words; she will tell Leah, and Leah will denounce me to the village. Accursed thought!—It shall not be. I will do more desperate deeds than slay a blind old man, if needs must."

Thus soliloquizing, Nathan returned slowly to the village. But though he tried to stifle remorse, it would arise in his guilty breast, and the apostate knew and felt he was a murderer, with the brand of Cain upon his brow.

CHAPTER IX.

LEAH THE FORSAKEN.

LEAH remained at the trysting-place, nor heeded the rain and tempest; for, was she not to meet Rudolph, her heart's idol—for whom she was ready to give up her people, her creed, her very soul?

The storm passed, the wind died away, and the moon shone out, but though it was long past the hour Rudolph came not. Faithful and true herself, she waited and waited, nor dreamed that he would disappoint till more than two hours had elapsed beyond the time. Then she thought he had been detained, and resolved to wait a little longer. Surely he would come? But another half-hour passed, and still he came not.

"Perhaps he was ill," she thought, and resolved to go to the village and seek him. With timid and uncertain steps she made her way thither, fearful and trembling, not for herself, but lest something—some disaster—had befallen him. It wanted but an hour of midnight when she arrived at the village. She knew not where Rudolph dwelt, so bent her steps to the house of Lorenz, thinking he might be there. Cautiously she approached the window and listened. Yes—she heard his voice in conversation within.

For a long time she could not make up her mind to knock, but at last summoned up sufficient courage, and timidly ascending the steps, rapped gently.

She heard footsteps approaching, and presently the door was thrown open, and she saw the magistrate Lorenz standing at the threshold, with a candle in his hand. She shrank back as she noted the angry look with which he regarded her.

"How now, thou Jewess! what wouldst thou here?" he demanded, roughly.

"Sir—I crave pardon!" she said, meekly, "I would have speech for a brief space with Rudolph, whose voice I heard within."

"Treacherous, mercenary deceiver! you took the gold—wouldst have more?"

She did not understand his words. At that moment Rudolph, who had heard and recognised her voice, bounded out—

"Woman! what want you here?"

Such was the rough greeting of the man who but the day before had sworn eternal love, and called her *wife*!

"Rudolph!" she cried, in terror, "how have I offended you? What means this?"

"What means this? Mercenary woman! you well know what it means."

"Rudolph, you do not know me—you cannot know me! Call me by my name."

"Yes, I know you—Leah. Leah, the Jewess!—the false—the avaricious!—who first, by her deadly arts and fascinations, won my heart, and then took gold to throw me off. What want you?—more gold!"

"Gold!—great Heaven! what means this? I take gold?—Explain," she gasped.

"I will not explain. You know full well what I mean," he cried, with fury. "Accursed sorcerers!—you know——"

"Am I mad? What do I hear? Are you mad, Rudolph, who speak to me of gold—I, who worship the ground you tread upon—who would not barter your love for the wealth of the world? Rudolph!—you cannot mean what you say. Cease this dreadful jesting!"

But he was in such a tempest of passion that he scarce heard her words; and when she strove to take his hand, he rudely flung her off.

A cry of despair broke from her, and she fell on her knees before him.

"Rudolph—Rudolph! hear me—it is all I ask; and then cast me off if you will."

Rudolph, in spite of himself, was moved by her attitude, her words, and seemed inclined to listen. He advanced towards her doubtfully, but at that moment Lorenz approached him and said, in a low tone—

"Do not listen to her; there is witchcraft in the syren's very voice. You know her falsehood. Had she come through the ordeal faithfully, I could not have said another word; but—*she took the gold!* We have the evidence of Bertolf; and not of him alone, but of the others."

"True!" muttered Rudolph, blinded by passion and deaf to all reason—"She took the gold!"

"No!" he cried, impetuously, "I will not listen to

you. Accursed sorceress, avaunt!—begone from my sight. Take your gold and go!”

She rose from her knees, and approaching him tried again to take his hand.

“Hear me! hear me!” she cried, beseechingly.

He raised his hand, and she shrank back, thinking he was about to strike her.

“Fear not,” he said, bitterly; “I shall not strike you. ’Tis not your body I would hurt, but had I the power, ’tis on your cruel heart the blow should fall. Accursed daughter of an accursed race, once more—begone!”

Working himself up to a pitch of frenzy, he raised his voice as he cried out—

“Here—you took gold—since gold you want, you shall have more. It was what you came for—take it!—take it!—take it!”

And with those words he produced a purse of money, and dashed it on the ground at her feet.

For a moment she gazed at it in speechless horror; then she raised her eyes imploringly to his face, and clasped her hands as if begging for mercy. Ignorant of the accusation he brought against her, she could not understand his sudden fury.

“Rudolph!—Rudolph!—hear me—you must, you shall hear me!”

She started suddenly forward, as though to hold him, for he was retreating towards the house. She had scarce touched him, than with cruel force he tore himself away, and, without a word, entered the house, and closed the door.

She stood for a moment speechless, as though spell-

bound ; then she tottered, and with a faint cry fell to the earth in a swoon.

* * * * *

No pitying hand raised her head as she lay in her deathlike faint ; no one troubled what might become of her. They were all Christians there ; and she was a despised Jewess. And so she lay till the cold night air brought her round, and she awoke to a sense of her misery. Slowly she arose, and silently, with faltering steps and breaking heart, crawled away, and in the darkness and solitude of the night made her way back to the lonely hut, to find there her father dead, the woman Ruth delirious with fever. But no one cared—she was only a Jewess.

“Forsaken!—forsaken! He has cast me off. Jehovah ! let me die !”

Such was her prayer all through the dreary, sleepless night.

CHAPTER X.

LEAH'S CURSE.

A WEEK has passed, and once again we see the Jewish maiden bending her steps towards the village—a week of such unutterable woe as falls to the lot of few—was passed by Leah, ere she could decide again to seek Rudolph and ask for an explanation.

It dawned on her by degrees that there must be some dreadful mistake. She remembered his words—that she had taken gold as the price of her love; and the persistence with which he repeated the accusation.

“Some enemy has lied to him,” she said to herself, “and in his anger he would not even listen to me. I will see him, tell him that the wealth of the world would be as nothing in comparison with his love, and that nothing but death can quench the flame which devours me! Perhaps,” she thought, “he too has considered and repented his rash harsh words; perhaps even now he is thinking of me—longing for a reconciliation, though too proud to seek one. Happy thought! No pride shall stand in my way, or bar my hopes of happiness with Rudolph!”

Inspired by these happy thoughts, Leah walked on with firmer step and lighter heart. In joyful anticipation of her interview with Rudolph, she forgot

the time her misery, her loneliness; forgot that she was now an orphan, that her old father was dead, and Ruth so ill as to be incapable of speech. All this she forgot, and thought only of her love and Rudolph.

The village is gained, and now Leah notices that though there are no people to be seen, yet it wears the aspect of a *fête* or gala. Flags are flying from many of the cottages, and decorations of flowers and coloured paper abound. The bells, too, of the church ring out a merry peal, and the few shops in the place are closed.

"Perhaps some day of Christian observance," thought Leah, though not without some wonderment at the gay aspect of the village. She passed the house of Lorenz, the magistrate, and noticed that it was closed; and that apparently, the shutters being up, there was no one within. Then she walked on towards the sound of the merry church-bells, which still rung out a joyous peal.

"Perhaps a wedding," she thought; "some happy couple about to pledge their vows at the altar."

As she arrived at the churchyard the bells suddenly ceased. She paused and listened. After an interval of a quarter of an hour or so, the solemn strains of an organ fell on her ear. Then again all was silent.

Leah's curiosity was aroused as to what ceremony was being performed within; and, advancing noiselessly, she looked through one of the windows. For a moment or so she looked in breathlessly, eagerly.

But suddenly there broke from her lips a piercing shriek—a cry wrung from her breast by desperate agony—the cry of a broken heart, a crushed spirit.

Only once did she so call out ; and then, stifling the gasping sobs which rose to her throat, she staggered to a broken monument, and, leaning thereon, buried her face in her hands. She remained thus—motionless, heedless of all external objects, for many minutes. Her faculties were benumbed by the terrible shock she had received, and she was scarcely conscious of her existence.

Presently the church-door opened, and Rudolph came forth. Leah was partly concealed by the monument on which she leaned, and he did not see her.

“ Was it a dream ? ” said Rudolph, looking round ; “ was it fancy ? I thought I saw a face at the window—the face of Leah. A cry, too ! Did I not hear a cry ; or was that, too, but imagination ? Oh, Leah ! Leah !—cruel, wicked, treacherous—shall I never drive your image from my heart ? My dear wife, Madelina, whom this day I have wedded, I love her ; yes, certainly, I love her. Why, then, does the face and form of this Jewess constantly rise before, haunt me by day and night, even in my dreams ? Scarce had the priest pronounced the words which made us man and wife than the apparition of Leah appeared at the window, and I heard a cry—a cry of pain and agony. It was but imagination—a weak, foolish fancy. And yet——”

“ It was no fancy, Christian ; I am here.”

Leah herself stood before him, but so deadly pale and with such a fierce fire in her large dark eyes, that Rudolph drew back for a moment aghast.

“ Leah ! ”

“ Yes, Leah !—Leah the betrayed !—Leah the for

saken! Look on your work! Triumph, oh man! See the wreck you have made—think of the heart you have broken—the life you have crushed.”

“Leah, you sold my love for gold.”

“False—false—false as your own heart, Rudolph. I saw no gold—I took no gold—was offered no gold.”

“God of Heaven!” exclaimed Rudolph, a sudden light breaking on his mind. “Can it be—is it possible that I have been deceived? Leah, Leah, answer me, I adjure you. Did you take a purse of gold on condition of renouncing me, and leaving the province for ever?”

“Did—I—take—a—purse—of—gold?” she said, slowly, and with withering scorn. “Christian, the words should blister thy tongue. Did—I—I—take—gold?”

The impressive, contemptuous manner in which she said these words, and the bitter scorn in her look, and the lightning which flashed from her dark eyes, carried greater conviction to Rudolph’s mind than any denial could have done.

“Leah, I have been betrayed. I was told you took money to leave for ever.”

“You—were—told—I—took—money?” she said, in the same slow, deliberate manner; “and though but the day before you had sworn eternal love—had called me by the sacred name of wife—though your arms had embraced me, your lips been pressed to my brow, yet you did not deem me worthy of a question—a hearing—but in your unjust rage cast me off, spurned me—me, your love, your wife. Christian, answer for thyself.”

"Leah, Leah, pardon me, my eyes are opened—we have been deceived. Have pity."

"Pity! Christian. What pity had you on me when I, kneeling at your feet, prayed but to be heard? Pity! Such pity as you gave shall you receive."

Rudolph absolutely cowered before her. She looked like an avenging spirit pronouncing the doom of a criminal.

The outcast Jewess was grand in just indignation. Her tall, graceful form was drawn up to its full height; her look, her eyes, her gestures, breathing unutterable scorn and hate.

"Leah, hear me," said Rudolph, meekly. "Bertolf, the schoolmaster, was sent to you to offer a purse of gold on condition of your leaving the neighbourhood at once and for ever. Others accompanied him. Word came back that you had accepted the money. I questioned him—I asked those who accompanied him. 'Yes,' they said, 'the Jewess gladly took the money.'"

"And I was not worthy of a thought. Although you had sworn eternal love, you would take the word of these people not only against mine, but without even asking me. Rudolph, *I have loved*, now I hate. I have prayed for blessings on your head, now I will pray to Jehovah to rain curses."

"Leah! Leah! do not curse me; I have wronged you, I will repair the injury—I will."

"You will repair the injury!—you lie, you cannot. Can you pluck the flower, grind it beneath your heel and then repair the injury? Can you heal a bruise

spirit!—a broken heart! THOU SHALT NOT STEAL, says th mmandment. *You stole my heart. THOU SHALT NOT KILL. What a life have you left me ?*"

She advanced towards him, and he, utterly subdued, shrank back as though fearing her vengeance.

"In the days of old, when our people were led into captivity, they were as now, proscribed, persecuted, ill-treated. They took from us all worldly goods—they made us slaves—they treated us worse than the beasts of the field. But they could not take from us our hate—they could not rob us of the curses we heaped on their heads. 'Woe, Babylon!—our song of vengeance'—and with uplifted hands, as I now raise mine, our rabbis would curse them; and when they heard the words, 'Woe, Babylon!' the heathen trembled."

Rudolph had a rosary in his hand. Leah suddenly darted forward, and snatched it away. Then raising her hands above her head, she invoked a bitter curse upon him—

"Accursed Christian!—accursed may you live!—accursed may you die!—may the earth refuse her fruits to thee!—may thy wife live to curse thee as I curse thee!—may the offspring of thy marriage be accursed!—may the brand of Cain be on thy children's brow!—may they perish at their dying mother's breast!—may earth be hell to thee!—and the gates of heaven for ever closed to thee and thine!—mayst thou be an outcast on the world!—and may the curse I breathe on thee ring in thy ears from now till thy dying day!"

Rudolph fell on his knees in horror at this terrible malediction. "Mercy! mercy, Leah!" he cried.

But she went on unheeding; raising her hands

above his head to give full effect to her terrible words :—

“Accursed living, accursed dead !—accursed in this world, accursed in the next !—accursed !—accursed !—and in the manner of our people I say—AMEN !—AMEN !—AMEN !”

CHAPTER XI.

FIVE YEARS AFTER—LEAH REVISITS THE OLD SPOT—
SEES RUDOLPH, AND RECALLS HER CURSE.

AND now, good reader, we must again in fancy make a leap in time of five years. It is the same season of the year—glorious autumn, when the bountiful earth yields her fruits to man. Through the same forest, in which still stands the ruined hut, a solitary female figure may be seen wending her way.

She pauses, and gazes about her as if in doubt as to the road.

She appears a young woman, of perhaps twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age. Though very pale and weary-looking, her face and form are of exquisite beauty—a beauty to which the deadly pallor of her face gives increased effect. For, set in the pale foil her glorious dark eyes gleam like black diamonds, and the dazzling whiteness of her shoulders is the more apparent from the rich masses of dark hair which flow over them in wild disorder.

The face and form are such as cannot fail to strike, the features are so grand and majestic in their beauty; the form, wearied and worn though it be, so grandly graceful in every movement. The eyes, too, so large and dark, seem to blaze with unearthly splendour; and

the dark hair flowing so loosely, in such unstudied disorder, produces an effect no art could hope to attain.

Doubtless the reader recognises in the handsome woman of six-and-twenty the girl of twenty-one, scorned and spurned by her lover, and, farther back yet, the child of old Abraham Geld, first introduced to notice at her father's house at Frankfort and the castle of Monte Corro.

In short, Leah, the Jewish maiden.

Presently she paused and gazed around her. It was an open glade in the forest, and in the centre stood a stone cross.

Her eye fell upon it, and she gave a sudden start of recognition, and the pallor on her cheek deepened for a moment.

"Now I know where I am. Here, by this very cross, years ago, I kept tryst with Rudolph, and exchanged vows of eternal love—vows to be broken on his part, and thrown in my face, but vows which, through all these bitter years, my heart has kept holy."

She pressed her hand to her heaving breast, and gasped for breath.

"Oh, Rudolph! Rudolph! that I should have lost your love and lived so long! God of my fathers! to whom, for Rudolph's sake, I would have proved recreant, how often have I prayed to you for death! But still, through all, my love lived—its bright flame has burned on through contumely and misery, and now, I repent me of the bitter curse I breathed—I *repent me of the wrong I have done him, and forgive*

CHAPTER

THE JEWISH WARDEN.

run at the close of harvest time, and the worthy
Hermann had chosen a saint day from the calendar for
ritual observance as a thanksgiving for the suc-
cessful gathering in of the produce of the soil.
The villagers as they emerged from the little church
saw by the way, waited outside to receive the parting
greetings of Father Hermann, and whilst so doing

remained among themselves.
Whilst they were so doing, there arrived a man who
had been wandering in one of the mountain valleys,
and who brought news that a tribe of wandering Jews
was in the neighbourhood. This excited a great com-
motion among the villagers, for the very name of Jew
filled all the houses with horror and detestation.

"What want the accursed ones
with them?" asked Bertolf. "Y
They come to rob
the w

several hurried off to see that their offspring were secure.

"Let us drive them from our valleys—the accursed heathen," cried Bertolf; "they pollute the very air we breathe."

"Ay—let us drive them off," shouted the villagers in chorus. "Away with them!"

"What means all this commotion?" asked Father Hermann, as he came out from the church. "Are ye all going mad?"

"Not mad, holy Father," said Bertolf, cringingly, "but only sorely scandalized, for we have just heard that a tribe of wandering Jews are in the neighbourhood. The people cry to drive them away."

"Nay, nay, good schoolmaster, be not so intolerant," said the good priest. "What though they be Jews, shall we persecute yet more this persecuted race? Let them be; doubtless they have only encamped near us on their journey, and will depart again."

"But suppose they do not depart," said Bertolf, in sinister tones. "Supposing the infidel dogs design to take up their abode here. It must be seen to, good father; it must be seen to."

"I will see to it," said Rudolph of Monte Corro, who had heard the latter part of the conversation. "I am going up into the mountain valleys, and will discover and question these people as to their intentions. There is no need for persecution or cruelty. It would ill become us as Christians, and yet we cannot allow Jews to settle among us."

"Hear to Rudolph—he speaks well," cried several of the villagers.

the bitter wrong he has done me. Here, by this cross—emblem of the faith of the Christian, the poor Jew's enemy and persecutor—I kneel. O Jehovah! I pray for forgiveness for him and myself."

Then the Jewish maiden fell on her knees, and prayed fervently and long, her frame convulsed with emotion, her bosom heaving with sobs.

She arose presently, and walked on with firmer tread and bearing. On still, on till the gloomy forest is threaded, the open gained, and the well-remembered village appears before her.

It was harvest-time, and most of the inhabitants were in the fields, so that she passed through the village unheeded.

Presently she came to the well-remembered house of Lorenz, the magistrate, the father of Madelina—now the wife of Rudolph. There was an open space before the house, and here there sported and gambolled a child, a pretty little girl of about four years.

"My child," said Leah, "will you give me a drink of water?"

The child opened her eyes, stared for a moment at the stranger, and then ran off and returned with a mug of pure water.

"Who are you?" she asked, in a childish, prattling way. "I don't know you. What is your name?"

"No matter for my name, child," said the Jewess, with a faint smile. "What is yours?"

"My name is Leah," she replied, looking up in her face with childish innocence.

The wanderer started, and gazing in the little girl's face, turned deadly pale. She gasped for breath.

"That likeness ! Great God ! can it be—and that name, too—can it be his daughter ?"

She buried her face in her hands in uncontrollable emotion, the child the while looking on in silent wonder.

"Leah !—she says her name is Leah. I will ask her who is her father. Little girl, what is your father called ?"

"His name is Rudolph ; and I love him, and every one loves him very much."

"Rudolph !—'tis he ; and my heart did not deceive me."

Again such a rush of emotions swept over the poor wanderer's soul, that it seemed she must faint. Presently, however, she recovered herself, and by a desperate effort, though the lips which framed the words were white as her face, she asked—

"And where is your father ?"

"Father has gone a long way. Mother says, to Vienna, with a petition to the great emperor."

"To Vienna with a petition ?—for what ?"

"A petition for the poor Jews."

"For the Jews ?" she almost shrieked—"for the Jews ? Then even now he has not forgotten me. And he named his child Leah after me. O God ! how can I live ! Why does not my great love burn up my body as it does my soul ?"

She rocked herself to and fro, while convulsive sobs broke from her.

The child looked on in the greatest astonishment.

"Don't cry, good lady," she said, in her sweet, *infantile voice*. "Father will be back presently, and

mother too. She has gone to meet him ; and then, if you are hungry, you shall have some dinner."

"Your father is coming back to-day?" she cried, clutching the child's arm.

"Yes, this afternoon. Are you not glad? Because I am, and so is mother, and so is everybody except Bertolf the schoolmaster ; and I don't like him—he is a dreadful man, and so ugly, and no one likes him."

"Bertolf!—Nathan the apostate!—accursed be his name!—accursed——"

She checked herself suddenly.

"I will curse no more. I have done so too much already."

Leah then took her seat on a bench outside the porch, and taking the child on her lap, commenced to talk to and caress her.

Presently a voice from within was heard calling—

"Leah! Leah! come here."

"Oh, there's grandfather calling. I must go to him," cried the child, getting down from the wanderer's knee.

"Stay a moment, my child. I have something I wish you to give to your father."

Then she took from around her neck a string of beads, with a cross attached—a rosary.

"See here, my child ; give this to your father when he arrives, and tell him that a poor wandering outcast gave it you for him. Do not show it to any one else, nor tell any one."

"Oh no, I won't tell any one. I will give it to father. I do so like a secret ; and grandfather shan't know. Oh! isn't it pretty?"

And then the child ran prattling into the house, leaving the poor Jewish maiden alone with her misery.

She sat for some half hour pale and disconsolate, communing with her own wretched thoughts; and then, attracted by the sound of people approaching, rose, and looked down the road.

"'Tis he!" she murmured—a deadly faintness coming over her—"tis Rudolph and his wife. I cannot meet them now. I will avoid them, and conceal myself."

There stood opposite the open space in front of the house of Lorenz some large trees, whose overhanging branches cast a broad shade around. Leah hastened to conceal herself behind these, and awaited the coming of Rudolph and Madelina. She heard their happy voices as they approached, talking as man and wife talk, of affairs at home when they meet after a long absence; and every word was a dagger in the heart of Leah. They passed without seeing her; and she had an opportunity of noticing closely the form, face, and mien of Rudolph—her lost love. He looked graver than of yore, she thought; and even in his happiness she fancied she could discern a tinge of sadness. Her heart yearned towards him, and it was with difficulty she repressed its tumultuous beating, and the sobs which threatened each moment to break from her heaving breast.

Rudolf and Madelina rested themselves on a rude bench beneath the shade of one of the trees, with their backs to Leah, who was so placed that she could see and hear all.

"And now, Rudolph, tell me the result of your journey."

"I was successful, Madelina; and the gracious emperor said to me with his own lips these words—

"'Jews and Christians are equally my subjects, and as such have equal right to my protection and that of the laws.'"

"My heart thrilled with joy at the words; and I thought of five years ago, when that poor Jewish girl and her people received such cruel wrong and outrage at the hands of the villagers, and alas, Madelina, at my hands!"

There was a silence of a moment or two, which was broken by Rudolph—

"Ah, Madelina, the sound of that Jewish maiden's curse yet rings in my ears; in my very dreams she is constantly before me, with her pale face and reproachful eyes. May Heaven forgive me, for I wronged her deeply, I fear, though I knew it not. It was not till afterwards I heard that the treacherous Bertolf was at the bottom of it, and that he never even saw her. I could have torn him limb from limb then, in my just rage; but it was too late to repair the mischief. She went, after burying the old man, her father, according to the rites of her religion, and left me, Madelina, that curse—that terrible curse."

"Oh, Rudolph, will you never cease to fret and grieve about it? The poor girl was no doubt bitterly wronged, but it lies not at your door, for it was not intentional on your part."

"I know it, Madelina; and yet it haunts me night and day, and robs me of all happiness, even in your

dear company. She cursed me with a bitter curse; and though our child has not the 'brand of Cain on its brow,' yet have *I* in my *heart*; for the girl loved me, Madelina—wildly, passionately, as only such natures as hers can love; and with her love I killed her *life*, for if she be not dead, I feel sure her life must be a living death. She can never forget; and knowing all—her love and my fault—I feel in my heart that her curse has taken effect——”

At that moment a sob which, with all her efforts, she could not restrain, broke from Leah.

“Hark! what was that?” said Madelina.

They both looked round, but could see nothing; and at that moment little Leah ran out, and took off their attention. Having embraced her, and listened for awhile to her innocent prattle, the child produced the rosary, and gave it to her father.

“See here—a strange lady gave it to me—such a nice kind lady; but she looked so pale and ill. Do you know, I think she is going to die.”

Rudolph took the rosary, carelessly at first, but when he glanced at it, a sharp exclamation broke from him—

“The rosary, Madelina—the rosary Leah snatched from my hand five years ago! Where got you this, child?”

“A lady gave it me, father—a lady with a pale face, and great dark eyes—so pale and so beautiful; she said I was to tell you it came from the ‘poor wandering outcast.’”

Rudolph fell on his knees, and devoutly kissed the rosary.

"Madelina, 'tis the rosary; it came from Leah as a token of forgiveness. God be praised for this mercy! Poor injured outcast! I prize this peace-offering above all earthly goods. Leah—Leah, may Heaven bless and befriend you!"

Again a stifled sob is heard, and, rising to his feet, Rudolph sees before him Leah, the Jewish maiden.

Her face is pale as death, while tears stream down her cheeks.

"Rudolph, I have come to recal my curse. May God forgive me, and bless you!"

She could say no more, but held out her hands, and tottered forward as though she would have fallen.

Madelina seized one hand, Rudolph the other, and they placed her on the seat from which they had risen. Her head fell heavily back, her eyes closed, and she seemed to be going off into a swoon.

"Quick, quick, child—bring wine!"

But Leah with an effort recovered herself; and though a cold perspiration stood on her brow, and her face was ghastly pale, she raised herself slightly, and spoke.

"Rudolph," she said, "and you, Madelina, his wife, listen to me. The curse I pronounced upon you for all these long years—ages of misery to me—has weighed upon my mind; but till to-day my stubborn heart could not bend; and even through my constant and fierce love there gleamed the fire of hate. Rudolph, I love you still. I—can—own it—before—your wife—without—shame—for—I—am—dying—and—have—wandered—here—to—recal—my—curse—and return—your—rosary."

Her voice grew feebler as she went on, till it sank almost to a whisper.

"No, no, Leah; you are not dying. Live—live for us!—be our companion, our constant true friend, and let us forget the unhappy past!"

"It cannot be, Rudolph! I have seen you and recalled my curse; and now my hour has come! The cold hand of death is on my heart."

"No, no—say not so!" said Madelina, who, good woman, was weeping copiously. "Take some wine—you are faint; you will be better presently."

Leah's head again fell back; again she nearly swooned; and it was not till wine was given her that she could again speak.

While she lay thus, half fainting, in the arms of Rudolph and Madelina, a confused noise—a sound of many voices—was heard approaching.

Leah had thought she had entered the village unseen, but it was not so. Nathan the apostate, known as Bertolf, had seen her—recognised her, and with deadly malignity had resolved on her destruction. The noise became louder, nearer.

"The Jewess—the sorceress!—where is she?"

And with threatening cries and shouts a mob rushed on, headed by Nathan, who had succeeded in inflaming their ignorant minds into a state of fanatical fury.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

NATHAN rushed forward, and, pointing to the fainting Leah, as she lay in the arms of Rudolph and Madelina, cried savagely—

“There she is, the accursed heretic!—seize her, and drag her away!”

But before his cruel words could be obeyed, Madelina arose and stood between the trowd and Leah, while Rudolph drew her towards the portico of the house.

“Back, ye cruel cowards!—back at your peril, nor lay a hand upon the woman,” cried Madelina. “This is the house of my father, your magistrate. Dare to break the law, and ye shall repent it bitterly. Where is your warrant for this outrage?”

This seemed to have the desired effect, for the crowd fell back, and even Nathan looked crestfallen.

“She is right,” he said to those around him, in a hoarse whisper. “Let us get the necessary authority to expel the accursed heretic or send her to prison!”

Then they hurried off after Nathan, and Leah was

again alone with her protectors. She was but slowly recovering from her swoon, and had not heard the voice of her old enemy.

Rudolph thought and hoped that Nathan had been cowed by the firm and fearless manner of Madelina; but in this he was mistaken.

Leah was very slow in recovering from her swoon, and it was near an hour before she could again speak. Then again was heard the tramp of many feet; and Nathan, at the head of a still larger crowd, re-appeared.

"Here is the warrant and accusation against this heretical witch, duly signed and attested. Officers, do your duty!"

Two men, in the Government uniform, advanced as if to seize on the poor victim.

"Hold!" cried Rudolph; "what is the accusation against this poor woman?"

"That you will know anon. In the meantime, officers, seize her."

"Back—let not a man lay a hand upon her!"

The two officers paused for a moment, as though in doubt.

Leah arose to her feet and confronted the treacherous Nathan. His hateful voice aroused her, and now she stood like a tigress at bay, glaring at him with her dark eyes.

"Nathan Mira, apostate and murderer, what wouldst thou with me? I am here, Nathan the Jew! What is your will?"

There was an intensity of passion in her words, her looks, which impressed all. She looked, in her grand

beauty, like an accusing angel come to denounce him.

"Nathan the Jew!" "She calls him Jew!" "What does it mean?" cried several.

A confused murmur ran round the crowd. They were staggered by her manner, her beauty, her bold accusation; and above all by the words "Nathan," "Jew," and "apostate," as applied to him.

"Seize her—arrest her! The heretical sorceress raves; she will accuse you all presently, and perhaps bewitch you with her hellish charms!"

"No, *Nathan Mira*," said Leah, pointing to him with outstretched arm, and in slow deliberate accents; "*I will not accuse all, but I accuse you! You, Nathan Mira, of Frankfort, once a member of the synagogue, son of Rabbi Moses Mira, whom you robbed and left to starve—you I accuse, though it be but of one of your many crimes! I accuse you of the murder of Abraham Geld! The woman Ruth heard his last words, and saw you strangle him. Nathan—apostate—murderer!—I, Leah, the Jewish outcast, accuse you!*"

"Nathan Mira!" exclaimed Rudolph, starting forward; "is that the villain? Now—now I recognise you, despite your beard and disguise. Atrocious wretch, the day of retribution has arrived! Seize him, officers—this woman accuses him of murder! *Seize the villain!*"

"No, no! I will not be taken. 'Tis but the word of a Jewess, and a madbrain who, years ago, as you all remember, was bewitched by her. Besides, by our

laws a Jewess or a Jew cannot give evidence against a Christian !”

“True ! true !” cried several ; “a Jewess cannot give evidence.”

“Not so,” said Rudolph, advancing to the officers, and producing a sealed parchment. “This day I have returned from Vienna. I have seen our most gracious emperor. Here is his mandate, signed and sealed, in which he gives his imperial command that from henceforth and for ever Jews shall receive equal justice, and be heard in the law courts equally with all his other subjects. There is his Majesty’s signature. Officers, do your duty ; dare not to disobey the emperor’s mandate. Arrest that man !”

Nathan turned ghastly pale, and looked round as if to fly ; but there was no escape, for the two officers, convinced by Rudolph’s words and the guilty mien of the accused, seized him one by each arm.

Meanwhile, Leah produced some papers from her bosom, and handed them to Rudolph.

“Rudolph, here are papers which will restore you to your own ; take them. The woman Ruth is at the ruined hut in the forest ; she awaits me there. Tell her of my death, and let her bear witness against my father’s murderer. Rudolph, Heaven bless and protect you ; the hand of death is upon me. I die happy now, Rudolph ; my love for you has never ceased. Kiss me once—only once.”

He pressed his lips to her cold forehead for a moment—then she fell back fainting, dying in his arms—the mists of death gathered around her—her

dark eyes glazed as the grim King of Terrors drew his curtain and shut out the world from her failing vision. A slight shiver shook her frame.

"ADIEU, RUDOLPH!" she gasped, faintly.

His name was the last word her lips uttered; and then departed to her God—the soul of LEAH, THE JEWISH MAIDEN.

THE END.



